# MARCIA.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THIRLBY HALL," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. III.

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# CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

# MARCIA.

## CHAPTER I.

### MR. MORTIMER.

When Lady Wetherby said her prayers—and this she did with unfailing regularity twice a day—she never forgot to return thanks for the extraordinary number of blessings which had been showered upon her all her life long. She had, it is true, lost her husband, and that had been a terrible grief to her; but time had caused the wound to heal over, and she had not the shadow of a doubt that she would meet him again in a future state of existence, and in the meantime she was very well contented to linger for a while upon the surface of this more or less agreeable planet. She had found her residence here below agreeable, as well she might; for she had good health, a large jointure, and children who had given her all the happiness that it is in the power of children to

bestow upon a fond parent. If Wetherby had any vices, she was not aware of them, while Evelyn, though she had sometimes behaved in a way which had made her mother a little uneasy, now seemed quite inclined to do the right thing and marry Mr. Mortimer, and take her place amongst the better class of young matrons.

Lady Wetherby, who was as good a woman as ever breathed, would not for the world have urged any daughter of hers to marry for the sake of wealth or position; but, other things being equal, a son-in-law who possesses both of these advantages is a son-in-law to be desired, and there were very few mothers in England who would not have deemed Mr. Mortimer desirable. He had large estates in several counties; he was a gentleman and a sportsman; he raced a little and hunted a good deal, and shot pretty well; probably he would enter Parliament before he was much older. Nobody had a word to say against him, while very many people were loud in praising him; so that there was every reason to rejoice at the thought that he would shortly be coming to Torquay in his yacht, and that he would come with a special and scarcely disguised purpose.

Lady Wetherby had no great fear but that he would succeed in that purpose. So far as she was

aware, he was without a rival, and assuredly it would never have occurred to her to dread poor Willie Brett in that capacity. Indeed, she was but seldom reminded of the young man after his departure, nor did she see very much of her neighbour and the friend of her youth. Evelyn did not get on with Mrs. Archdale, and when Evelyn did not get on with a person it was always the simplest plan to avoid asking that person to the house. So, although Marcia and Lady Wetherby remained upon the best of terms, their intercourse was confined to occasional drives into the country, during which the former discoursed chiefly upon the disenchantments of life, the latter listening in a good-humoured, somnolent fashion, and abstaining from contradiction when she found herself unable to agree.

All this time Willie had not only remembered Lady Evelyn, but was thinking about her through every hour of the long summer days. He had never been in love before, and now he had taken the disease in its severest form. He was not sanguine; he was sure that she did not care for him, he doubted whether she ever would, and he thought it extremely likely that she already cared for somebody else. Nevertheless, he would not for any earthly consideration have obliterated the

memory of her from his mind or parted with the sweet sorrow which, as he was convinced, was destined to last him his life. It does not and cannot last. Love, like all the other passions and emotions which stir the surface of our shallow mortal nature, passes away; but young people do not know this, and will not believe it when they are told, and in truth one would be very sorry if they did believe it. For the rest, it may be admitted that some men and women are far more constant than the general run.

Willie Brett might fairly claim to have established a character for fidelity. He had not been unfaithful as a lover, for the excellent reason that he had not hitherto been a lover at all; but he had been somewhat unusually faithful as a son, and he was now fully prepared to brave his uncle's displeasure for his mother's sake. If it was not entirely for her sake that he contemplated spending a month or six weeks in the watering-place where she was sojourning, yet he would cheerfully have done as much to please her, nor would he have been deterred from doing so by any fear of Sir George. He respectfully signified his determination to that powerful personage, promising that the latter portion of his leave should be passed at Blaydon, and abstaining from any

promise as to the future disposal of his private means; after which he had the comfort of feeling that he had done his duty all round, and might legitimately employ his leisure in dreaming of the good time that was coming.

A very happy fellow he was when the longed-for day came at last, and he reached that beautiful and sunny town of villas which had the privilege of containing the two people whom he loved best on earth. One of them was ready to receive him with open arms. Perhaps she would have been less demonstrative had she believed in the existence of a rival; but, oddly enough, she had not detected what had been perfectly apparent to her husband, and had laughed the suggestions of that experienced observer to scorn. As one grows old one does not, as a rule, grow more credulous; yet one grows more willing to believe whatever one wishes to believe, and Marcia would not have been Marcia if she had not wished her son's heart to belong to her alone.

"It is such perfect happiness to have you with me again, Willie!" she exclaimed. "But I have never doubted you through all these long years; I always felt sure that you would come back to me some day."

One would have thought, to hear her, that it

had been he who had separated himself from her, and it is not in the least impossible that she may have formed some confused impression to that effect. In any case, he did not quarrel with the terms in which she welcomed him, nor did his patience give way when she embarked upon a plaintive recital of her grievances. Torquay, she told him, was ineffably dull. Cecil did not find it so, because he was always playing whist at the club when he was not working by fits and starts at an unfinished picture; but she herself had no friends and no interests in the place. "However, it is comparatively cheap, so I suppose one ought not to grumble," she concluded, with a sigh.

"But you have Lady Wetherby: she is still here, isn't she?" asked Willie, for he was naturally anxious to ascertain that much.

"Oh yes; Laura is still here; only she isn't much use, somehow. Laura is one of those people who have got everything that they can possibly want, and have sunk into a state of sleepy contentment which makes them rather uninteresting to associate with. Besides, she generally has friends or relations staying with her, so that we don't meet very often. Her daughter is a rude, disagreeable sort of girl, too."

That singularly inappreciative expression of

opinion was all that Willie was able to obtain from his mother in the way of information about Lady Evelyn; but he was more successful with Flossie, who presently came in to tea, and who, after greeting him enthusiastically, led him out into the garden to show him the spot where she had interred the remains of a deceased canary. Flossie, it appeared, had made friends with Lady Evelyn, and required but little encouragement to expatiate upon the young lady's charms.

"Is she going to marry Mr. Mortimer?" the child inquired. "Everybody says she is. You know Mr. Mortimer, don't you? He has come here in his yacht, and he told me he would take me out sailing some day, but he hasn't done it yet."

"I used to know him when we were boys," answered poor Willie, with a sinking sensation about the region of the heart; "I have never seen him since. I suppose he is as good-looking as ever?"

Flossie made a grimace. "Oh, I don't know. He isn't bad; but he isn't half good enough for Lady Evelyn. I should like *you* to marry her," this impartial looker-on continued, with engaging candour. "Do you flirt with her? Papa says you do, and then mamma gets quite red and says, 'Stuff and nonsense!'"

"Mamma is right," replied Willie gravely; "I have never flirted with Lady Evelyn Foljambe, and I have never had the chance. Is she—er—given to flirting?"

But to this insidious question Flossie could make no satisfactory response. Was flirting wrong? If it was, Lady Evelyn certainly didn't do it. She seemed to like Mr. Mortimer, though; and that was a pity, because Mr. Mortimer was "not nearly as nice as you are."

All this was not very reassuring, and the worst of it was that Flossie's statements were fully corroborated by Mr. Archdale, who came in from the club just before dinner, and who professed himself greatly pleased by the arrival of his guest. It was not until the two men were smoking together in the evening that he broached the subject to which Willie had more than once tried ineffectually to lead up; but when he did so he was as explicit as could have been desired.

"I am sorry to tell you, my dear fellow," said he, "that your nose has been put out of joint. I saw that you were smitten with the fair Lady Evelyn when you were down here last—you needn't blush, there's nothing to be ashamed of in that—so my heart quite bled for you when

I found that another was destined to bear away the prize. If I were in your place, I dare say I should try to cut out Mr. Mortimer, for the fun of the thing; but the chances are that you wouldn't succeed, and if you did succeed you would undoubtedly regret it afterwards. People who marry always do regret it afterwards. All the same, she is an uncommonly pretty girl."

"Is Lady Evelyn engaged to Mortimer?" Willie asked, in a voice which he could not contrive to keep steady.

"Well, no; I believe not. But she is going to be. It's a first-rate match, you see. You yourself are not to be sneezed at; but, saving your presence, Mortimer is a cut above you. There's a vast difference between expectation and possession, not to mention his aristocratic connections."

Now, it was evidently out of the question to discuss such a topic any further with a man who regarded it in that vulgar light. Willie disclaimed any intention of pitting himself against Mr. Mortimer, and began to talk about something else. Nevertheless, he walked over to Lady Wetherby's villa on the following morning, though he knew that he was doing an unusual and unceremonious thing by calling before luncheon. When it comes to be a question of life or death, or of life-long

misery or happiness, use and ceremonial must needs be disregarded.

Not, of course, that he was so insane as to think of hinting to Lady Wetherby at the motives which had prompted this matutinal visit. He found her in the drawing-room, writing letters, and she was so kind as to say that he did not interrupt her at all, and he duly discoursed upon topics which did not possess the slightest interest for either of them during fully five minutes before he made so bold as to inquire after Lady Evelyn.

"Oh, she is quite well, thank you," answered Lady Wetherby. "I believe she is sitting out on the verandah with Mr. Mortimer. Perhaps you may have heard their voices."

Willie thought he had—indeed he was quite sure that he had, and he was not very reluctant to comply with a suggestion which his good-natured hostess presently put forward.

"I don't want to send you away," said she; "but I really must finish these tiresome letters before luncheon. Won't you stay and lunch with us? And I dare say you would be better amused in the meantime if you were to go out and join the young people."

So he stepped out through the open window, and in another moment the meeting which he had

pictured to himself a hundred times as taking place after a hundred different fashions was over. It is scarcely necessary to add that he did not behave in the least as he had intended to behave, and that if Lady Evelyn Foljambe had been the most casual of acquaintances he could not have greeted her more formally. She said she was so glad he had made up his mind to give poor Torquay a second trial, and then she introduced him to Mr. Mortimer.

"Only you don't need to be introduced to one another, do you?" she asked.

"Rather not!" responded Mr. Mortimer, as he rose from the chair in which he had been reclining. He was a well-proportioned young man, with light brown hair which would have curled crisply if he had allowed it to grow long enough; he had bright blue eyes and a straight nose, and his slight moustache did not conceal the perfect curve of his lips; so that altogether it would have been quite absurd for any rival to deny him the advantages which belong to a prepossessing exterior.

"This is a rare piece of good luck, Brett," said he; "I've often wondered what had become of you, and I've asked heaps of fellows; but nobody knew anything more than that you had gone into the Army. I say, do you remember our both getting nailed up at Windsor fair? I was swished and

you weren't, which I thought hard lines at the time, and I think so still."

"Not a bit," answered Willie. "I could plead 'first fault' and you couldn't; that was how it happened."

Well, it was impossible to resist the friendly overtures of an old schoolfellow who could appeal to such reminiscences; added to which, Willie felt that he had no right in the world to quarrel with any man for being more highly favoured by fortune than he himself was. In manhood, as in boyhood, contests may be amicable, and a gentleman should always be ready to say "*Detur digniori*," however bitter may be the pangs of defeat. Therefore, since Lady Evelyn was so obliging as to second her mother's invitation, and since Mortimer had a vast stock of incidents relating to old Eton days to refer to and chuckle over, Willie consented to remain where he was, nor had he any reason to repent of his decision. For it really did not seem to him that Lady Evelyn and Mortimer conducted themselves at all like a pair of lovers, though he kept an anxious watch upon them both before luncheon and during that meal. Mortimer, it was true, appeared to admire her (small blame to him) and was in a certain sense attentive to her; but they did not, so far as Willie could discover, ex-

change any stolen or significant glances, nor did they manifest the slightest desire to rid themselves of the company of third persons. On the contrary they both entreated him to come on board the yacht on the following day and sail round to Dartmouth. To be sure, Lady Evelyn rather robbed this invitation of its flattering character by adding: "It will be an act of real kindness to mamma if you will come. Her duty as a mother and a chaperon compels her to brave the perils of the deep with us; but she hates the whole thing, and she will feel ever so much happier if she is provided with a companion in misfortune."

But if that sounded a little like an intimation that he was valued rather for purposes of general utility than for his own sake, the same objection could not be brought against a proposal which Mortimer broached as soon as they had left the dining-room.

"How are you going to get through the afternoon, Brett?" he asked. "You haven't an idea, of course; it's impossible that you should in a place like this. Well, now, I'll tell you what you shall do. You shall come out to Babbacombe Down with me and we'll play golf. Did you ever play golf before?"

Willie shook his head. "I've seen it played

once or twice," he answered. "It didn't look to me to be much of a game."

"That's all you know about it! However, for the sake of argument, we'll call it a poor game if you like. Even so, it's exercise, and any game is better than lolling in a garden-chair and staring at the view, isn't it?"

Willie was of opinion that that depended very much upon the question of who might chance to be sitting in the neighbourhood of the garden-chair; but he was gratified to hear so frank a confession of his friend's tastes, and when Lady Evelyn announced that she would drive her pony-cart as far as the downs later in the afternoon for the purpose of seeing how the players got on, he was able to say with perfect honesty that he would like very much to try his hand at golf. Given such conditions as were offered to him, he would have liked very much to try his hand at marbles. Lady Wetherby, it appeared, did not deem her duty as a mother and a chaperon compelled her to accompany her daughter on this occasion, for she observed that she was going to pay a round of calls.

"And I think," she added, "I will end by looking in upon your mother and telling her that you are in safe custody. Otherwise she may take it into her head that you have fallen over one of the cliffs."

"Well, then, that's all settled," said Mortimer, who seemed to have a good-humoured matter-of-course way of settling things in accordance with his personal wishes. "Come on, Brett, we shall have to look sharp if we want to finish before dark."

## CHAPTER II.

### LADY EVELYN BACKS THE WINNER.

What makes the average upper-class Englishman so much happier, healthier, wiser, and more serviceable than his compeers of other nations (and nobody, it is to be hoped, will have the perversity to deny that he is all of these things) is, without doubt, his inherited and invincible love for sports and pastimes. It may seem a little hard upon those whose avocations debar them from hunting, rowing, cricketing, and playing football, or whose tastes do not incline them thereto, that they should deteriorate physically and mentally, by reason of their disabilities; but many natural laws seem hard, and the most superficial observers cannot fail to perceive that people who lead a sedentary life do deteriorate. Nevertheless, rowing is a pursuit which usually has to be abandoned before youth is well past, and football is a game for boys rather than for men, and middle-aged cricketers are seldom of much use; so that a man

may very well be still full of vigour and yet not know how to provide his body with the exercise which it requires, unless he has learnt to play golf.

Not many years ago, all golfers who dwelt south of the Tweed were compelled, when speaking of their favourite relaxation, to take up an apologetic tone: they had to explain with humility, and with the chilling certainty of being disbelieved, that an immense amount of experience, dexterity, and self-command are requisite in order to make sure of hitting a little ball across five hundred yards of broken ground and depositing it in a small hole in four or five strokes; but now that golf-links have been established all over England, there is no longer any need to make excuses for one of the finest games that human ingenuity or the accident of circumstances have ever called into existence. The theory of the game is simplicity itself—you have only got to put your ball into a hole in one or more strokes less than your opponent—but the practice is full of difficulty, and what is better still, full of endless variety; so that you may go on playing golf daily, from the age of eight to that of eighty, and yet never grow tired of it. Indeed, the circumstance that grey-haired enthusiasts are to be seen enjoying themselves thoroughly, and losing

their temper ludicrously wherever the "royal and ancient" sport has taken root has caused certain ignorant persons to describe golf contemptuously as an old gentleman's game. Such criticisms, however, only come from those who have not attempted to acquire the art; and some of us have good reasons for holding that a game which need not be abandoned with advancing years is quite the right sort of game.

Golf-links, of course, differ even more widely than cricket-grounds; it is not everywhere that one can obtain such a noble stretch of the peculiar description of land required as at St. Andrew's or Westward Ho! and the Torquay Golf Club is but a modest association which has never achieved notoriety.

"You mustn't expect anything great," Mr. Mortimer warned his companion, while they were walking out towards Babbacombe together; "the greens are very fair, and there are some pretty little hazards; but it isn't a course for long drivers."

"I'm quite sure that it wouldn't be the course for me if it were," answered Willie, laughing. "I shall miss the ball altogether at first, shan't I?"

"Yes, very likely; but you'll soon get into the knack of it. I'm not much of a performer myself, you know; only I've played a little in Scotland,

and as I foresaw that I should be at Torquay for several weeks, off and on, I thought I had better try to keep myself in condition by joining the Golf Club. If I give you a stroke a hole, you ought to be able to make a match of it. A stroke is pretty heavy odds to allow with short distances like these, mind you. However, we'll see how things go, and if it isn't enough I can give you more."

Willie, who, to tell the truth, was a good deal more interested in his friend's incidental admission that he meant to remain where he was for several weeks, than in the fairness of the proposed handicap, asked whether Torquay was a good place for yachts to lie. But Mortimer had come out to play golf, not to discuss his personal plans and proceedings.

"No; beastly," he answered briefly; "one wouldn't think of stopping here if one hadn't friends in the place. Now, I'll tell you what it is, Brett: there are a hundred things that you ought to bear in mind every time that you get into position for a drive; but the only important thing is to hit the ball clean, and you had better start by doing that the best way that you can. Keep your eye dead upon it, let the club swing back slowly, and don't attempt to swipe. Stick to these rules and you'll probably astonish yourself."

Golfers will perceive that this Mentor was not without glimmerings of science ; for of course there can be no sounder advice than to hit the ball clean, just as there can be no sounder advice than to shoot a pheasant in the head instead of in the tail, and novices are less confused by being told what they ought to do than by being instructed as to the best means of doing it. Still, when they had reached the little club-house, and when Willie had been supplied with the necessary equipment of driver, brassy, iron, short spoon, cleek and putter, as well as with a boy to carry these implements for him, he had naturally but a hazy idea as to the method of their employment. Mortimer led him up to the down, indicated the whereabouts of the first hole (which was invisible from the starting point) and told him to "go straight for it." The result was that he made a short, sharp, cricketing sort of stroke, thumped the ground hard and sent his ball about ten yards in the required direction.

"That's what everybody does at first," remarked Mortimer placidly. "I'll just show you the way to drive."

Now, Mortimer, who had not learnt golf as a boy, and consequently had no chance of ever becoming a player, had acquired a totally unorthodox style which, nevertheless, proved telling

about once in three times, and which therefore gave him far too high an opinion of himself. On this occasion he hit the ball fairly, although he had no business to do so, and thus he not only swept it away out of sight, but buried it beneath a stone wall which intervened between the strikers and the hole. As, however, he did not know what a misfortune had overtaken him, he was proportionately complacent.

"That's about the right line," he remarked. "Now you'll have to play again. In the ordinary course of things you would be playing the 'odd,' but as I'm giving you a stroke, you only play 'the like.' The ball isn't lying particularly well, so you had better take your cleek. Hit as hard as you like; you won't go too far."

A cleek is a weapon with a comparatively short shaft and a polished steel head: it is more frequently made use of by beginners than by experts. Willie, obediently following the advice that had been given him, put his whole strength into his next stroke, and, notwithstanding that, as before, he wasted a large proportion of this upon mother earth, he was so far successful as to get well under his ball, which he sent some hundred yards on its way.

"That will do very well," said Mortimer ap-

provingly. "If you can only manage to play your iron, your next stroke ought to land you on the green."

It is not every mature golfer who can make sure of playing his lofting-iron, which is the most difficult of all the clubs to use effectively; but nothing gives such confidence as complete ignorance, and Willie, having been told what he ought to do, performed the unexpected feat of doing it—so that his quick wrist-stroke lifted the ball high into the air and deposited it close to the fluttering white flag which marked the hole.

Mortimer only said, "By Jove!" But he used more forcible language than that when his own ball was discovered, wedged in between two stones of the wall which they now approached. He said that sort of thing was very hard lines, and showed the nasty, tricky nature of the course over which they were playing. "As fair a drive as I ever made in my life—and then to get punished in this way! I don't mind legitimate difficulties; but really it's too bad to have hazards that no human being can get out of. Of course that gives you the hole; because the only thing I can do is to lift and lose two strokes."

The hole was not necessarily lost yet; but perhaps his annoyance caused him to lose it, for,

after lifting his ball and aiming at it somewhat carelessly, he sent it back to very much the same place from which it had been taken. After that, he observed that it was not worth while to try again, and explained that his antagonist had won the first hole by sheer good luck.

But his ruffled equanimity was restored after he had taken the second hole with perfect ease. This, being placed on the summit of a hill, beyond another wall and a clump of gorse-bushes, demanded a lofting stroke, which he delivered accurately, whereas Willie came to hopeless grief in the gorse and had played "six more" before he extricated himself.

Indeed, as the game proceeded, our hero began to feel that respect for it which the realization of genuine difficulty always commands. He did not do by any means badly, for failure did not exasperate him as it exasperates short-tempered men, and his eye and hand were accustomed to work together; but he soon perceived that he was no match for Mortimer, who made plenty of mistakes, but whose blunders were less disastrous than his own, and who had, besides, the advantage of being acquainted with the ground. To be sure, he did not very much care whether he won or lost. What he cared about a great deal more was to ascertain

the true position of affairs as regarded this old schoolfellow of his and Lady Evelyn Foljambe; and golf, fortunately, is not a game which precludes intermittent conversation. While they were walking along, side by side, between the strokes, he learnt that Mortimer thought both Lady Wetherby and Lady Evelyn "awfully nice people," that he had become intimate with them during the preceding London season, that he was only at Torquay for the purpose of being near them, and that he was in the habit of seeing them every day. More than this no lover could be expected to reveal, and if the information thus frankly imparted was not wholly acceptable to Willie, neither was it wholly the reverse, since it seemed to leave a loophole for hope. Was it not possible, after all, that this impending engagement might, as Archdale had hinted, be of Lady Wetherby's contriving, and that neither of the young people were particularly keen about it. At any rate, it struck him as significant that his companion should be apparently unmoved by a circumstance which was beginning to cause him some personal disquietude.

"Do you think Lady Evelyn can have missed her way?" he asked at length; for they had now finished the first round, which consists of nine holes.

"Oh, she knows the way well enough," answered the other unconcernedly; "she'll turn up before long, I expect. At least, if she doesn't it'll be because she has thought of something more amusing to do. Now, Brett, you must pull yourself together; you're four holes down, and you can't afford to lose many more."

In spite of this warning, Willie lost the next hole by what looked very like downright carelessness. The game upon which he was engaged might possess all the intrinsic merits under the sun; but it was not possible for him to give his whole mind to it after having been threatened with such a disappointment, nor did he feel that his spirits would be very much lowered by the most ignominious of defeats. But before he could give further cause for just offence to his opponent (because nothing is so provoking as to play any game with a man who does not care to win it), the slim figure of a young lady, clad in a plain costume of brown cloth, was seen approaching over the brow of the hill, and that pleasing spectacle put quite another complexion upon the state of affairs. For although Willie did not mind being beaten, he naturally did not wish to make a ridiculous exhibition of himself under the eyes of the young lady in question.

Unfortunately, that was just what he proceeded to do, notwithstanding—or more probably in consequence of—his determination to play his very best. Lady Evelyn drew near, but did not open her lips, knowing better than to speak to a player on his stroke, while Willie swung his club well back over his shoulder and delivered what would doubtless have been a fine drive if he had not inadvertently taken his eye off the ball at the last moment. The sad consequence of that fatal error was that his club swished harmlessly through the air, without touching anything, and that Mortimer burst into a shout of laughter, in which Lady Evelyn joined.

"Missing the globe" at golf may be likened to "catching a crab" in rowing. Either misfortune may, and sometimes does, happen to veterans, and is inevitable in the case of novices; but under no circumstances can the spectator of such calamities refrain from merriment.

Still, a man who is worth anything at all can always stand being laughed at, and Willie submitted with outward composure to the ridicule which he had earned. In his next effort he was a little, but only a little, more successful. This time he hit his ball as hard as could have been wished; only, as he did not hit it quite in the right place,

it skimmed along the ground, instead of rising into the air, and ended its career by striking a loose fragment of rock, from which it rebounded. What was additionally vexatious was that Mortimer took this opportunity to make the best stroke that he had made that afternoon, his ball soaring gracefully over stones, gorse-bushes and all other obstacles, and bounding on to the very verge of the hole. Lady Evelyn applauded, as in duty bound; yet it seemed that her sympathies were where the sympathies of all true women ought to be—with the weaker side.

"Never mind," said she to Willie in a low voice; "he won't do that again for some time, you may be sure. Take it quite easy, and you'll beat him yet. How many holes is he up?"

"Six, I'm afraid," answered Willie ruefully. "He was five up just now, and of course he must take this one."

It certainly looked as though he must; but every one who has instructed or watched beginners at golf, is aware that they occasionally perform miracles. To pull the ball into the hole with a lofting-iron at a distance of over sixty yards is unquestionably a miraculous feat for a beginner, and how Willie achieved it he, for one, had not the most remote idea. Such as his stroke was, how-

ever, it gave him the hole; for, since he was in in three and was receiving a stroke, his antagonist could do no more than halve it, and this Mortimer failed to do by making a short, angry "putt" which missed its aim.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter, as he walked away, "of all the outrageous flukes that ever I saw in my life——"

"It *was* an awful fluke, I must admit," said Willie apologetically.

But Lady Evelyn would not allow that it had been any such thing. "You played for the hole, I suppose, didn't you?" she asked. "You meant to go as near it as you could? Very well then; you did what you intended to do by magnificent play. I always understood that fluking meant doing something which you never intended to do."

Now, whether this definition of fluking was or was not strictly accurate, it showed the bias of the speaker after a fashion which Willie could not but find encouraging, and indeed she presently declared in so many words that she wanted him to win.

"I am sure," said she, "that you are one of those people who are apt to fail through excess of modesty. Mr. Mortimer doesn't suffer from that disadvantage."

Mr. Mortimer just then suffered under the disadvantage of having driven his ball a long way off the line. He consequently had to walk after it, and thus opportunity was afforded to Lady Evelyn to say a few more words about him. He was wonderfully little spoilt by prosperity, she was pleased to remark. He could not fairly be called conceited, although he was upon pretty good terms with himself, and he bore chaff very good-humouredly. At the same time, he was rather too prone to take it for granted that every wish of his must needs be gratified; so that his soul's welfare was likely to be promoted by such occasional surprises as the loss of a game of golf.

"Did he look to see whether you were wearing that bracelet when he came?" asked Willie, glancing involuntarily at his neighbour's wrist.

She laughed. "Yes; and he was much astonished at not discovering it in its proper place. However, thanks to you, I didn't have to confess that it was at the bottom of the sea. I told him that it was safely locked up somewhere or other, and that I sometimes wore it."

"I thought it was the peculiarity of *bracelets de bonheur* that they were to be *always* worn," said Willie.

"So did he, but I undeceived him. The theory

is that you part with your happiness when you take off the bracelet; only, as I have proved by experience that that isn't the case, I feel myself in a position to snap my fingers at theories."

This was pleasant hearing for Willie, who grew irrationally light-hearted after listening to several more speeches of a like nature, and who played carefully and tolerably well when it was borne in upon him that Lady Evelyn sincerely wished him to succeed. If there were any ground for hope that as large a proportion as one per cent. of those who will do this modest narrative the honour to peruse it would take an intelligent interest in the details of a golf-match, these should be recorded as fully as they deserve to be; but since, unhappily, British public opinion cannot yet be considered to be ripe for the appreciation of such particulars, it is perhaps best to state merely the bald fact that the combatants were all even when only three holes remained to be played. That that was an exciting state of things anybody will understand and believe.

The first of these Mortimer won easily enough. Possibly Willie was unlucky, as Lady Evelyn averred that he was, in hitting a ball clean over the cliff into the sea; but a perfectly unprejudiced person might have said that he had no business to

aim in the wrong direction. Anyhow, the consequence was that he was one down, with two to play; and now he had to retrieve his fortunes as best he might.

"This," observed Mortimer, as he placed himself in position for a fresh start, "is a longish carry. I shall go for it; but if you'll take my advice, Brett, you won't attempt it. Your best plan will be to bear away to the left and try to get over in your second."

What he meant was that about a hundred and twenty yards ahead of them was a wall, close to which grew a tangled mass of brambles, and that any player who failed to clear that wall might count with some certainty upon involving himself in irremediable grief. It was his fate to illustrate and exemplify the value of his counsel; for, notwithstanding the strength that he put into his stroke, he did not give it quite sufficient elevation, and his ball dropped dead into the worst part of the hazard which it had been his design to surmount. After that, it was clearly his opponent's duty to play a cautious game; but Lady Evelyn, who was guided by feminine impetuosity and had no sound golfing instincts, would not permit him to show the white feather.

"Don't be afraid," she said; "be a man or a

mouse! I'm sure you can easily send a ball twice as far as that."

Without feeling by any means the same confidence in his capacity, Willie could not refuse to obey instructions conveyed in those terms. He aimed for the distant wall, hoping against hope that fortune might aid him; and then, by pure accident, occurred one of those wonders which do occasionally reward the courage of the inexperienced. He had long arms; he took the full swing which amateurs, as a general rule, are compelled regretfully to abandon; he hit his ball exactly where he ought to have hit it and sent it whistling through space beyond wall and brambles and all other obstacles that intervened between it and its goal.

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Lady Evelyn, clapping her hands.

Well, there was no playing against that kind of thing. Mortimer got out of his trouble as well as could have been expected, but lost two strokes in the process, and was unable to make up for lost ground by subsequent good play. So the last hole became the deciding one, and, under the circumstances, it was not surprising that both players started for it with perceptible nervousness. Both of them were over careful, and both encountered

difficulties which might have been avoided with a little more audacity. Both, however, reached the putting-green with the expenditure of an equal number of strokes, whereupon Mortimer, drawing in his breath, made a bold stroke and holed out. Willie, therefore, had two for the half and one for the match. He was fully fifteen yards from the hole; it was unlikely that he would be able to put his ball in, and there was great danger of overrunning it. The bystanders remained silent and motionless; only a slight smile curved Mortimer's lips. Willie took plenty of time to think about it, and then delivered his stroke. The ball rolled along the ground, straight enough, but very slowly —surely too slowly! It reached the very brink of the hole, paused for the fraction of a second, then turned over once more and dropped in.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Lady Evelyn delightedly. "I am so glad you have won! You couldn't possibly have played that better."

Mortimer may be excused if he could not conscientiously echo the above assertion; for of course a putt which one stiff blade of grass might have diverted was not really a good putt. But he took his beating in excellent part, and said he would have his revenge another day.

"Meanwhile, you are coming to Dartmouth with

us to-morrow, aren't you, Brett?" he asked. "Be down at the harbour about eleven o'clock, and you'll find the gig waiting for you at the steps. Now, Lady Evelyn, if you were disposed to be very kind, you would offer me a lift home in your pony-trap. It won't hold more than one extra person, I'm afraid; but I ordered a fly for you, Brett."

Somehow or other, Willie half expected Lady Evelyn to put her veto upon this unceremonious arrangement; but she did not appear to resent it. They walked down to the road, where the little two-wheeled vehicle and the fly were waiting, and Mortimer jumped into the former without more ado.

"To-morrow morning, then," she said, smiling and nodding over her shoulder at Willie, as she gathered up the reins and drove off at a brisk pace.

## CHAPTER III.

### A DISAPPOINTING DAY.

Falling in love is probably a universal experience, and, like most other human experiences, it has its advantages and disadvantages. Amongst the former can hardly be counted any quickening of the patient's perceptions or any improvement in his or her judgment. To be in love is to believe that the person whom you love is not only more charming but also far better than the rest of our species—this, at all events, is the masculine point of view; one is not quite so sure about the feminine —and never since Adam wooed Eve has a true lover thought so meanly of the object of his affections as to suspect her of merely amusing herself at his expense. That, no doubt, is an accusation which true lovers are very fond of making; but they never make it sincerely.

Willie Brett, therefore, cheered himself on his homeward way with dreams in which hope pre-

dominated to an extent scarcely justified by the circumstances. He was not, of course, so vain as to imagine that Lady Evelyn had anything more than a moderate sort of friendly regard for him; but what he did think was that she could not care very much about Mortimer. Could one speak of anybody whom one loved in the kindly, approving terms which she had employed in speaking of that young man? Evidently not; and, quite as evidently, Lady Evelyn was not the girl to submit to dictation in the matter of choosing a husband. So that there seemed to be nothing out of the way in the conclusion that Lady Wetherby's maternal solicitude was likely to be disappointed, and that, whatever other obstacles might bar the path of a diffident suitor, Mortimer was not one of them.

But the thoughts and wishes and motives of young women are past finding out, while, as for maternal solicitude, it is a factor which ought to be reckoned with by every mother's son. If Willie did not realize this, it was perhaps because he had for so long been virtually an orphan. When he reached Mrs. Archdale's villa he found that he had still a mother who was disposed to claim all the rights belonging to her position. For Marcia was not in the best of humours that after-

noon, and her opinion was that she had been treated with scant courtesy.

"Will you have some tea?" she asked, as he entered the drawing-room. "I didn't expect to see you back before dinner-time, if then. Laura Wetherby has just been here, and she gave me to understand that they had taken possession of you for the day. Not very considerate of them, I think, when they knew that you only arrived last night; but I suppose it is natural that you should prefer being with them to spending a dull afternoon with me."

Willie could only hang his head penitently and murmur that he was very sorry. He was too scrupulously truthful to disclaim the preference attributed to him, but he said he had not really meant to be away all day. He had merely gone to call at Malton Lodge and had been persuaded to stay to luncheon, and then he had been asked to play a game of golf with his old schoolfellow, Mortimer.

"And with that girl, I suppose?" asked Marcia, sharply.

"Oh no; Lady Evelyn didn't play," answered Willie; "she only looked on for part of the time."

Marcia snorted. "I think that girl has been

very badly brought up," she remarked presently. "Laura allows her to do exactly as she pleases, and I don't think I ever met anybody with quite such disagreeable manners. I can't understand people calling her pretty, can you?"

Willie was bound to confess that he could understand it; whereupon Marcia snorted again. And now he had to make the still more awkward confession that he had promised to sail over to Dartmouth on the morrow in Mortimer's yacht, accompanied by the badly mannered girl and her injudicious mother.

Then there was a fine fuss. Marcia told him that if he intended to be absent all day and every day he had much better go to Blaydon at once. There at least he would be able to shoot partridges, which would be a more wholesome and dignified kind of sport than acting as a decoy duck—for he might rest assured that it was in that capacity that Lady Evelyn proposed to make use of him. As for herself, she ought not, she supposed, to wonder that he no longer cared to be with her; it was natural, no doubt, and she must bear it; only his indifference would be a little less hard to bear if he were out of sight. To the deep consternation of the culprit, who, as has been mentioned, was but imperfectly acquainted with the pecu-

liarities of the opposite sex, she ended by bursting into a flood of tears.

The sight of her distress filled him with remorse. He did not think her unreasonable; on the contrary, he felt that it was he who had been abominably selfish and thoughtless, and he said so. He would, of course, give up the Dartmouth expedition; in fact, his impulse at the moment was to declare that he would give up anything if only she would stop crying.

Fortunately, she did not take advantage of his weakness and alarm, the full measure of which she may not have conjectured. She only saw that he was repentant, that his neglect of her had not been caused by any lack of natural affection, and that he was very anxious to make friends again. That being so, she dried her eyes and smiled and met him half-way, as women, to give them their due, are generally ready to do. It is, after all, no fault of theirs that nine out of ten of them are so constituted as to enjoy a quarrel, whereas nine out of ten of us dislike nothing in the world so much.

"You mustn't take me so literally, Willie," she said, holding his hands in hers. "I was upset and worried—things happen every day which upset and worry me—and I suppose I fell foul of you

because you chanced to come in before I had had time to recover myself. I don't really believe that you care more for those people than you do for me. And you are to go to Dartmouth with them to-morrow, please. Yes; I insist upon it! I am not going to have them laughing at you for being tied to my apron-string."

In the end it was agreed that he should adhere to his engagement. He had been honestly willing to abandon it, but he would have been a very extraordinary specimen of humanity if he had not been relieved by the rejection of his offer. He could not make a confidant of his mother, because he saw that there was no hope of obtaining her sympathy. She seemed, unhappily, to have taken a prejudice against Lady Evelyn, and he had sense enough to be aware that reason never wins the day against prejudice. However, he made his peace without any further allusion to the subject of their contention, which indeed she speedily forgot; so that before he went upstairs to dress for dinner he had heard a good deal more about his step-father's shortcomings, and had been embraced and profusely thanked in return for a couple of bank-notes which he produced from his pocket. Bank-notes, luckily, cannot be traced back to their donor; but even if it had been a

question of a cheque, Willie could have written one unhesitatingly. Rightly or wrongly, he conceived that his mother was fully entitled to any aid that he could give her; nor did he doubt the truth of her assertion that it was not she who had made ducks and drakes of her own resources. Still, he was not quite so incensed against Archdale as he might have been if his mind had not been preoccupied with other thoughts. Archdale appeared to have behaved badly, and would doubtless continue to behave badly; but there was no help for that. What was less certain and considerably more interesting was the question of how Lady Evelyn Foljambe intended to behave.

On the ensuing morning he walked down to the harbour, with some hope of arriving at a solution of that doubtful point before the day should be at an end. And perhaps it was because Lady Evelyn and her mother, who drove up just as he reached the steps, greeted him in such a friendly fashion, or perhaps it was only because the weather was so bright and sunny, with a nice sailing breeze blowing off the land, that he felt unwontedly sanguine and light-hearted.

Lady Evelyn, too, seemed to be in high spirits. "We are going to have a perfectly glorious day," she declared. "After all, one does have some good

days even in Torquay, and though I never could understand the fun of yachting, I do enjoy an occasional sail in the *Albatross*—that is, when one is lucky enough to have the right people on board," she added, with a glance at Willie which, if it meant anything, must surely have meant that he was one of the right people—possibly also that Mr. Mortimer was not.

That may very likely have been the impression that she intended to convey; but whether her true sentiments were such as were implied therein, was quite another question. For no sooner had she set foot on the deck of the *Albatross*, a smart hundred-and-thirty-ton yawl, flying the white Squadron ensign, than she began to devote her whole attention to the fortunate owner of that vessel, and seemed to have suddenly forgotten that there was anybody else in the vicinity.

"I shall go below until we have got under way," said Lady Wetherby decisively; "I don't want to have my head knocked off."

Lady Evelyn, perhaps, saw no reason to dread that fatality, or was willing to take the risk of it. She remained where she was, chatting with Mortimer about things and people utterly unknown to Willie, while the yacht was released from her moorings, and glided past the pier-head under mizen

and jib. She had to duck when the mainsail was hoisted and the heavy boom swung over; but she evidently knew enough about nautical matters to be able to take care of herself, and indeed she presently showed that she, at any rate, had full confidence in her own seamanship.

"Now, Parkins," said she, turning to the skipper, "I'm going to steer."

"If you please, my lady," answered Parkins, resigning the tiller with a smothered sigh.

He looked so depressed as he moved forward and passed Willie, that the latter, though he did not feel particularly merry at the moment, could not help laughing. "You don't put much faith in your substitute, do you?" he asked.

"Oh, we can't come to no harm, sir," answered the man; "only I wish her ladyship could have waited a bit longer. You see, there's bound to be a lot of gentlemen staring out of them there club windows, and I don't know but what they might think we was all intoxicated."

It must be confessed that the course pursued by the *Albatross* was somewhat erratic, and that she did not appear to be making quite the most of a fair wind. But perhaps her owner was in no desperate hurry to reach his destination, and certainly he was indifferent to the possible censures

of the club critics. He sat upon the bulwarks, with his hands in his pockets, swinging one leg, while he kept up an unflagging conversation with Lady Evelyn, fragments of which reached the ears of the despised third person. Their talk, so far as he could gather, related entirely to royalties, and dukes and duchesses, and other grandees; it was not, perhaps, exactly the kind of talk in which lovers are wont to indulge; yet it was of a nature to make a humble lieutenant of infantry realize how very far he was removed from their coterie. After a time Lady Wetherby reappeared, and he had to get a chair for her and make her comfortable, and listen, rather inattentively, to her comments upon the news contained in the *Morning Post*, which she had brought on board with her. Not until they were off Berry Head, and luncheon was over, was any excuse given him for approaching Lady Evelyn, and by that time he was so thoroughly dispirited that it was she who had to take the initiative. When they left the main cabin, Mortimer went forward to give some order or other, and then it was that our hero's presence was at length recognized by the person who was alone responsible for it.

"How bored you look!" Lady Evelyn said, as she moved astern and beckoned to him to join

her, her mother having returned to a wicker chair and the *Morning Post*. "Don't you like yachting?"

"It all depends," answered Willie candidly; "I dare say I should enjoy it well enough if I had a yacht of my own, and if—if I could choose my company."

"That is truly flattering to the present company. Well, I don't think I care very much about yachting in anybody's company. It can't be called sport; all that can be said for it is that it's a shade better than going out for a constitutional. I'd rather be hunting, wouldn't you?"

This, it may be conjectured, was a leading observation; for Lady Evelyn had seen enough of her companion to know what his tastes were, and enough of men in general to be aware that it is useless to try and make them talk upon subjects in which they are not interested. Be that as it may, she very soon brought this young man to a happier frame of mind, and found him quite as good an authority upon the points of a horse as Mortimer perhaps was upon the domestic affairs of duchesses.

And Mortimer was apparently troubled by no ignoble sentiments of envy or jealousy. When he sauntered aft and perceived that he had been replaced, he sat down contentedly beside Lady

Wetherby, making no attempt to interrupt a colloquy which to one of those concerned in it was so delightful. Willie knew, or thought he knew, perfectly well that the girl whom he loved did not care a pin for him; but he also knew, or thought he knew, that she did not care a pin for his rival. That was as much as he could expect or hope for. To be permitted to sit by her side, to watch her face and to hear her voice—this was sufficient for him in the early stage of the malady with which he was afflicted. What if she did speak of nothing but protracted runs, and the pedigree of hounds, and the joys of cub-hunting, which were denied to her? It was, at any rate, to him that she addressed her remarks, not to the other fellow.

But the other fellow's turn came in due time; possibly the other fellow may have been comfortably aware that it would come. The pretty little land-locked port of Dartmouth was made early in the afternoon; the anchor rattled down, the gig was lowered, and Mortimer remarked that there would be heaps of time for a walk before taking the train back to Torquay. The party, on being set ashore, naturally headed, as everybody who lands at Dartmouth does, for the wooded promontory on which the quaint old church of St. Petrox stands; and doubtless it

was equally natural—at all events, it so fell out —that Mortimer and Lady Evelyn should lead the way, Willie being thus once more relegated to the charms of Lady Wetherby's society.

Lady Wetherby had a kind heart and an ample stock of common sense, and about as much perspicacity as is required for the recognition of the obvious. She therefore thought it only right to utter a few words of admonition for the benefit of her young friend, the expression of whose features had told its own tale to her during the previous hour. As she ambled beside him along the shady footpath she began, with transparent diplomacy, by deploring the change which had come over girls in the course of the last twenty years.

"I suppose that since the world began there must always have been flirts," she said; "but I don't think that flirtation was quite such a common, matter-of-course thing in my day as it is now. The men, no doubt, are chiefly to blame. They don't wish to be taken seriously; they only want to amuse themselves, and the girls, who very soon find that out, follow suit, and amuse themselves too. So perhaps it's as broad as it's long, and no hearts are broken when both sides play the game. But, as I always tell Evelyn, it

does occasionally happen that a man is really in earnest, and then it is very wrong to trifle with him."

"Of course I know nothing about it," said Willie gravely; "but I shouldn't have thought that Lady Evelyn was a flirt."

"Oh, I'm quite sure she doesn't mean to be," her mother declared; "but she is accustomed to receiving a good deal of attention, and perhaps she doesn't understand the difference between the men whom she meets in London and the men who may happen to turn up elsewhere. She says and does things which really mean nothing at all, and sometimes I am afraid that they may be taken as—as meaning something, you know."

Nothing could have been more explicit. Willie appreciated the kindly compassion which had prompted this warning, although it came too late in the day to be of any service to him. He was only one of the men who had "happened to turn up elsewhere," and his chances, no doubt, were infinitesimal; still, such as they were, he must needs cling to them so long as the shadow of a shade of hope remained.

"Is Mortimer one of the London men who don't wish to be taken seriously?" he ventured to inquire.

"Upon my word I can't tell you," answered Lady Wetherby, laughing. "I think he is serious, and I don't mind confessing that I hope he is. From my point of view he is unexceptionable; but my point of view may not be Evelyn's, and I wouldn't for the world urge her to act against her inclinations. As far as I can judge, she likes him: at all events, I am tolerably certain that there is nobody else whom she likes better."

Willie remained silent. After all, he had been told no more than he already knew; yet there is a difference between being aware of a fact and hearing it stated in plain words, so that he did not greatly enjoy the remainder of his walk. Lady Wetherby took charge of him until it was over—an arrangement which seemed to meet the approval of the other couple. What she discoursed about while they paced slowly through the woods and admired the prospect, and then retraced their steps to the landing-stage, whence they crossed by ferry to the Kingswear Station, he scarcely knew; but he had a general impression that she meant to be kind and was sorry for him. In the train, both Lady Wetherby and Mortimer fell asleep—fancy falling asleep at such a time! —but Lady Evelyn, who was gazing out of the window at the darkening landscape, responded

only by monosyllables to the few remarks which Willie made so bold to address to her, and it was evident that, whatever the subject of her thoughts might be, she was not thinking about him. After a time he desisted from troubling her. It was not until they were nearing Torquay that she took his breath away by leaning forward and saying abruptly—

"It has been a horrid day, hasn't it?"

"I didn't know it had," answered Willie stupidly; "I—I thought it had been a great success."

"So do they," she returned, indicating the two sleepers with a slightly disdainful gesture. "I didn't think so; but then I suppose I am rather hard to please. I dare say it's all right, and it doesn't much signify if it's all wrong," she added, throwing herself back again into her corner.

Torquay was reached, and Lady Wetherby and Mortimer were wide awake before he could ask her to explain herself; but while he was wending his solitary way homewards her meaning seemed to become clear to him. She had accepted a man whom she didn't love, and she was already beginning to repent of her folly; that much might be surmised. But why she had accepted the man, and whether her repentance would prove lasting, and what prospect there was of her adhering to

a hastily formed engagement—these were questions which sufficed to keep a straightforward and bewildered youth awake more than half the night through.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WILLIE GOES TO CHURCH.

Willie was mistaken in supposing that Lady Evelyn had accepted Mortimer's heart and hand. One excellent reason—possibly the only one—why she had not done so was that those priceless possessions had not yet been offered to her. However, she knew that she could have the refusal of them when she pleased, that she would be told as much ere long, and indeed that she had only escaped being told as much that very afternoon by some exercise of preventive skill. Evelyn Foljambe's ideas with regard to matrimony were those which commonly prevail amongst girls of her class and are not so very rare in other classes. At the age of fifteen or sixteen she had followed the dictates of human nature, dreaming of some more or less impossible hero, for whose sake, when the time should come, she would be willing to brave poverty and other afflictions; but a short experience of the realities of fashionable life had cured all that. She

had met a great many men and not one of them had been in the least heroic; the girls of her acquaintance had been heartless and sceptical, or at all events had talked as though they were so; even her mother had always seemed to regard marriage as quite an unromantic affair. The girls who were spoken of as having married well were those who had acquired a title or a fortune; the few who had married for love were considered to have made fools of themselves, and indeed she had had opportunities of observing that the latter not unfrequently ended by concurring in the general verdict upon their conduct. For her own part, she naturally judged of men as she had found them; she did not believe that any man would ever break his heart on her account, and she thought that if she met one whose social standing was such as to command the approval of her family, whose character was tolerably good, whose personal appearance was not unpleasing, and who seemed to be as much attached to her as it is within the range of masculine capacity to be attached to anybody, she would be extremely unwise to refuse him. As Mr. Mortimer fulfilled all those conditions, it was difficult to say why she had taken such trouble to keep him at bay during that afternoon walk or why she had been so petulant and dispirited on the

way home. She herself could not answer the question in any way that was agreeable to her, and a lecture which she received the next morning from her mother did not serve to put her in any better conceit with herself.

"Evelyn dear," Lady Wetherby began, assuming that kindly, serious demeanour which mothers always assume when they are a little bit afraid of their daughters, "I want to speak to you about young Brett. Of course I know that you mean no harm; but he may not understand—most likely he doesn't—and I think you ought to be a little more careful. He never took his eyes off you and Mr. Mortimer while he was walking with me yesterday."

"Well," said Lady Evelyn rather flippantly, "I suppose his eyes are his own and he can use them as he pleases."

"Yes; but you cannot wish him to use them in that way. And—and I doubt whether Mr. Mortimer would wish it either."

"Oh, *I* don't mind," Lady Evelyn declared. "As for Mr. Mortimer, I haven't reached the point of consulting his wishes upon such subjects yet, and I dare say I never shall."

"Probably you will not if you go on trifling with him. Patient as he is, you may exhaust his patience; and then, my dear, I think you will be

sorry. You know as well as I do—sometimes it seems to me that you know a great deal better—how few men there are who are so nice in every way as Mr. Mortimer; but one thing I know perhaps a little better than you do, because I am so much older, and that is that all men get over a disappointment far more easily than we do."

"I haven't a doubt of it, mamma; but I don't know of anything that would disappoint me particularly just at present, except being forbidden to speak to poor Mr. Brett again. And I really don't quite understand what I am being scolded about."

"I am not scolding you, dear," Lady Wetherby answered, "I am only warning you. I have never tried, and I never will try, to decide your fate for you; but I confess that I do like Mr. Mortimer, and I hoped from what I had seen that you liked him too."

"Oh, he is very well off and pretty well-behaved and not bad-looking," said the girl. "The same description applies to Mr. Brett, for that matter."

"Not altogether," observed her mother gently. "Mr. Brett may be a rich man one of these days, but his prospects are not certain, I believe; and then, although I don't mean to say that he hasn't all the feelings of a gentleman, still he isn't—well

—exactly in the same position as Mr. Mortimer, you know."

"I see," said Lady Evelyn; and, after a pause, "I'll endeavour to put him back into his proper position if he seems to be in danger of forgetting it, then. Meanwhile, I can't very well prevent him from looking at me, unless you forbid him the house."

Lady Wetherby did not say much more. Her daughter often puzzled her; for she was a very simple sort of woman, to whom the problems of life had always presented themselves in their simplest guise. She thought that Lady Evelyn was fond of Mortimer and would marry him; she was not at all afraid that the girl would become too fond of Willie Brett—only, for the poor young fellow's sake, she wished to nip a possible flirtation in the bud. And she was placidly persuaded that she had done so by means of the above remarks. As for adopting so extreme a measure as forbidding him her house, that of course was merely a joke.

However, whether by accident or design, she did not invite Willie to her house for several days, and since he was not asked, he remained away. He could not have adopted a more effectual method of quickening the interest which Lady Evelyn felt in

him. She had an impression that he, as well as her mother, had disapproved of the manner in which she had behaved on board the yacht, and that he was absenting himself by way of giving expression to his disapproval. Now this was both impertinent and unjust on his part; because, in the first place, her behaviour was no concern of his, and, in the second, she could conscientiously say that on that occasion it had been in all respects what it ought to have been. She wished, therefore, that he would be good enough to call, so that she might have the chance of giving him the snubbing that he deserved.

But the days passed on and he made no sign, and nobody seemed to wonder what had become of him. Some friends came to stay in the house, which enabled her to avoid *tête-à-tête* interviews with Mortimer, who accepted that temporary deprivation good-humouredly enough. Once she caught a glimpse of Willie in the distance. He was walking between his mother and his little half-sister and looked somewhat dejected, she thought. For some reason or other, that momentary view of him brought about a change in her feelings, and it occurred to her that perhaps, instead of being so presumptuous as to sit in judgment upon her, he was merely hurt by some-

thing that she had said or done. If so, it was surely her duty to take an early occasion of explaining that she was innocent of having intentionally given him any cause for offence.

The next day being Sunday, Lady Evelyn surprised the assembled company at luncheon by announcing casually that she was going to church in the evening.

"But, my dear child," remonstrated Lady Wetherby, who sometimes went to church in the afternoon, but had a vague idea that the evening services were intended for the poorer classes, "how will you manage about dinner? You can't be home by eight o'clock, can you?"

"Oh no; I don't suppose I shall be back much before a quarter to nine," answered the girl calmly; "but it doesn't matter. If one dish is kept warm for me, that will do perfectly well."

Lady Evelyn was allowed to take her own way in most things. The sun was just setting as she entered a certain church in the town, and as she settled herself in her place she saw in front of her precisely what she had expected to see, namely, the back of Willie Brett's closely-cropped head. For indeed he had told her that he was fond of good music, and was consequently in the habit of

attending the evening services at that particular place of worship.

It may be hoped that she said her prayers. At all events, she enjoyed the music, and if she did not derive much profit from the sermon, no doubt that was because it was absolutely necessary for her to go through a careful rehearsal of the interview which she foresaw would follow it. That Mr. Brett was alone and would walk home with her she was convinced, and this shows the disadvantage (it is more than outweighed by the advantage, but that is neither here nor there) of separating the sexes in church. For when the congregation dispersed and Lady Evelyn, who had measured her distance nicely, stepped up to the side of the unsuspecting young officer, it was rather disconcerting to find that Miss Flossie Archdale had already secured possession of his right hand. Flossie, to be sure, was delighted to see her and embraced her affectionately; but there was no great consolation in that. As for Willie, he also was probably delighted, although he did not look so. He took off his hat and seemed to be a trifle embarrassed, and said—

"I thought you never went to church in the evening."

"I am thinking of turning over a new leaf,"

answered Lady Evelyn gravely. "If other people can put up with a tepid dinner, why shouldn't I? Your church is very nice indeed. I presume from your frequenting it that you belong to the Ritualistic persuasion, and are therefore addicted to mortifying the flesh. Might one ask why you haven't done penance by calling upon us all this long time?"

"Ought I to have called? I didn't know," replied that stupid young man, who, not having had time to collect his wits, said the first thing that came into his head.

Assuredly he did not intend to be ungracious; yet his words sounded so to one who was perhaps on the look-out for ungraciousness, and by ill-luck he was unable to retrieve the false step that he had made, for before he could speak again the group was joined by Mr. Mortimer.

"How are you, Brett?" said that good-natured fellow. "When are you going to give me my revenge at golf? You said you were going to church, Lady Evelyn, so I thought I'd go too. Jolly sort of service—plenty of singing and flowers and candles and all that. First-rate voluntary too; only you wouldn't stop to listen to it."

If it had not been quite dark, Willie would have seen Lady Evelyn frown impatiently and colour.

As it was, he only heard her say, in a tone of pleased surprise, "Oh, is that you? How fortunate! Now you can see me home. I was going to victimize Mr. Brett, who, I am sure, will be grateful to be released. Good night, Mr. Brett. Good night, Flossie."

She bent down and kissed the child, gave Willie a little nod, and, turning up a side street, was soon out of sight, together with her escort.

"I wish Mr. Mortimer would go away," was Flossie's pertinent remark. "Lady Evelyn hasn't been half so nice since he has been here, and she never takes me out for walks now."

"I don't think he will go away just yet, Flossie," answered the young man gloomily. "Saving your presence, I shouldn't wonder if Lady Evelyn liked walking with him better than walking with you."

Of course there could be no sort of question as to that. The engagement might not yet be formally announced; but that it existed was evident enough. She had assumed without hesitation that Mortimer would be glad to accompany her to the top of the hill on which she resided, although he did not live there himself, and would have to come all the way down again; she had not even called him "Mr. Mortimer," but had addressed him as "you"—a very ominous sign.

Well, there was nothing to be astonished at in that, nor anything to grumble about; only if Mortimer was both unable and unwilling to leave Torquay, somebody else was neither the one nor the other. In truth there seemed to be nothing for it but to go away and court oblivion. Willie was quite aware that he had no right to feel sore; but that did not prevent him from feeling sore or from shrinking from the misery of seeing the girl whom he loved claimed by another man. Before the evening was over he found himself alone with his mother, Archdale having, in accordance with what appeared to be an established custom, strolled down to the club to smoke a cigar in the company of sundry choice spirits.

"I think," said he, taking advantage of this opportunity, "I may as well pay my visit to Blaydon at once and get it done. Then perhaps, if you cared to have me, I might come back here for Christmas."

"I know very well what that means," returned Marcia. "Flossie told me that you met Evelyn Foljambe at church this evening, and of course she snubbed you, and you were quite astonished at her want of taste, and now you are going to leave Torquay by way of punishing her. Unfortunately you will not punish her, because she has made all

the use of you that she ever expected to make; you will only punish me. Oh, what a pity it is that one sees nothing clearly until it is too late! I love you, whereas that cold-blooded girl, who isn't even attractive, loves nobody except herself. But it is useless to tell you that, for you won't believe it."

"I do believe that you care for me, mother answered Willie. He was not prepared to affirm that he believed in Lady Evelyn's cold-bloodedness, nor did he wish to speak about her at all.

"Then it is you who do not care for me," Marcia rejoined. "You have seen what my life is; you can't help knowing that all the cares and anxieties of the household fall upon my shoulders; you can't help knowing that I am lonely and wretched, and that my only happiness is to have you with me. Yet you propose to desert me, and you don't so much as pretend that there is any reason for your desertion. It is all in the course of nature, I suppose; when once birds are fledged they won't return to the nest. But it does seem to me that the course of nature is horribly cruel."

Fledged birds, as everybody knows, are cast upon their own resources by their parents, and Willie might have retorted that his mother had treated him after the fashion adopted by that least

maternal of birds, the cuckoo; but his inclination at the moment was rather to rejoice in this tardy display of affection than to murmur at the years of neglect which had preceded it, and he answered simply—

"If you really wish me to stay, I'll stay. I shall have to go to Blaydon sooner or later; but it needn't be yet."

"You must do as you please," returned his mother rather ungratefully. "Of course it will make all the difference to me whether you are with me or not; but perhaps it would be better for you to go away than to remain with any hope of winning that girl. It is true that she isn't worth winning if you only knew it!"

Willie resolutely declined to enter upon the question of Lady Evelyn's worth. He contented himself with declaring that he did not cherish any such hopes as were attributed to him—which was true enough—and assuring his mother that she might always count upon his presence when she desired it.

That seemed to satisfy her. As a matter of fact, she did love her son and longed to possess his whole heart, though she was not without a glimmering consciousness of the absurdity of such a longing. She did not love him well enough to

wish for his happiness rather than her own, because it was out of her power to love any one in that way; but she understood that he was making something of a sacrifice for her sake, which caused her to love him the more. That his happiness would be insured in the impossible event of Lady Evelyn's responding to his calf-love she did not for a moment believe. Lady Evelyn, in her opinion, was a detestable young woman, and what mother could wish her son to fall into the clutches of a detestable young woman?

## CHAPTER V.

### SIR GEORGE IS VERY FIRM.

It is a pity that our defective memory prevents us from realizing how much we understood in our childhood. Most of us are disposed to assume that children know no more than we are pleased to tell them, and thus we debar ourselves from the sympathy of the most sympathetic class in the community. Flossie Archdale, however, was what is somewhat inappropriately termed an "old-fashioned" child—that is to say, she had associated almost exclusively with her seniors—so that Willie was not very much astonished to find that she fully appreciated the nature of his position.

"I'm so glad you're not going away," she said to him in the most matter-of-course tone in the world. "Lady Evelyn doesn't really like Mr. Mortimer half as well as she likes you—I know she doesn't, because I asked her. But, if you left Torquay now, she would think you didn't like her at all."

This acute student of men and things further opined that in the abstract there could be no sort of comparison between Mr. Mortimer and her half-brother, the advantages possessed by the former being solely due to the facts that he had been first in the field, and that he was supported by Lady Wetherby. She recommended Willie to call without delay at Malton Lodge, and although he laughed at her, telling her that she was talking about matters beyond the comprehension of little girls, he neither spurned her partisanship nor despised her counsel. After all, he did owe Lady Wetherby a visit. So, one afternoon, he performed the duty required of him by social usages, and was rewarded by hearing that their ladyships had gone out sailing with Mr. Mortimer.

He handed his card to the butler and walked away, feeling a good deal more despondent than the circumstances warranted. That the ladies should be yachting on a fine afternoon was not very surprising or very significant; but it sounded to him like an intimation that he might have spared himself the trouble of calling upon them. Everything, no doubt, was settled, everything had probably been settled long ago; and what could be more ridiculous than to imagine that an infant like Flossie was in the secret of Lady Evelyn's

preferences? Well, he had never been sanguine, nor had he ever had any excuse for being so. Through no fault of his own a heavy affliction had fallen upon him; but he said to himself, as he walked away, that he would bear it like a man. As a general rule, irremediable afflictions are bravely borne for the simple reason that they must be borne; people who have gone blind or who have lost a limb do not sit in the corner and sob, because it is obvious that such behaviour cannot better their position, while it is a source of annoyance to those about them. Willie reminded himself that success in love is not the only kind of success which lends brightness to existence; he had his profession and the prospect of many glorious and exciting moments when hounds were running; he had health and a sufficient income and a few good friends. A man who refuses to be satisfied with so many blessings must be unreasonably exacting; but the truth is, that a man who is in love is always unreasonably exacting, and our poor hero could get no farther than to resolve that at least he would not whimper over his sorrows. And, if these were likely to be rendered rather more acute by this enforced lingering upon the scene of his discomfiture, there was no help for that. It was something to feel that his pre-

sence alleviated the hardships of his mother's lot, and apparently there was no great danger of his being often called upon to walk in the triumphal procession of his rival.

He had therefore quite made up his mind to suffer in silence, when he received a letter from his uncle, which not only offered him a loophole for escape but seemed to make it imperative that he should avail himself thereof.

"Your aunt," wrote Sir George, "wishes me to say that she would be grateful to you if you could come to us at once. She has been, and still is, seriously—though I trust not dangerously—ill, and I hope you will agree with me that the wishes of an invalid of her age are not to be lightly disregarded. I do not ask that you should stay long with us; I only beg, in her name as well as my own, that you should pay your visit to us now, instead of later in the year, and I may tell you that the doctors are unanimous in assuring me that your aunt's recovery depends to a great extent upon your consenting to oblige us. She is in a very low, nervous condition, I am sorry to say; otherwise I should not have requested you to alter your plans on our account."

There was no resisting that. Lady Brett's illness might not be of a very alarming character,

but then again it might be, and in any case it would be rather unfeeling on her nephew's part to disappoint her. This was what Willie felt, and he was sorry to find that his mother did not at all share his view.

"That is all rubbish," Marcia declared when she had been made acquainted with the contents of Sir George's letter; "they only want, as they always have wanted, to separate you from me. Of course, if you choose to play into their hands, you can do so; only I hope you will give them to understand that at least you are not their dupe. Caroline has been more or less upon her deathbed ever since I first knew her, and I haven't a doubt that she will be still dying after I have been laid in my grave."

"She really is ill," said Willie apologetically; "I don't believe she would be alive now if she hadn't been taken great care of, and I think I ought to go when she asks me." He added after a momentary hesitation: "Aunt Caroline has her faults, but she has always been very kind to me."

"Oh, well—go, then!" returned Marcia, with an impatient laugh. "I know quite well what you mean—I haven't treated you as a mother ought to have done and she has been so good as to replace me. I always knew that your simplicity would

lead you to that conclusion, which isn't altogether false, when all is said and done. Nevertheless, if you had thought a little more about it, you might have understood that I haven't been quite free to consult my own inclinations through these long, weary years."

Willie made the reply that he was expected to make, but adhered to his resolution. Certainly he was anxious to leave Torquay for a time; yet it was not for that reason that he had decided to obey the summons conveyed to him, nor did he propose to be absent for more than a fortnight. It seemed probable that before his return Lady Evelyn's engagement would be formally announced; after which his position would, he thought, be less painful. But, however that might be, he could not have found it in his heart to distress his aunt, who, as he truly said, had always been very kind to him.

Lady Brett, in reality, had defects from which some of us happen to be exempt, while she possessed good qualities which are perhaps a little less common than they are generally supposed to be. Narrow-minded, bigoted, and unamiable, she was nevertheless strictly conscientious. She habitually did what she conceived to be her duty; she never wittingly told a falsehood; she was a

good hater, she was a staunch friend, and she loved her nephew better than anybody else in the world, not excepting her husband. If she was eager to withdraw her nephew from what she imagined to be malignant influences, it would be as unreasonable to blame her for that as to blame a colour-blind man for confusing red and green. It is not everybody whose eyes are clear enough to discern things as they are, nor are any of us over ready to accept the evidence of other people's senses. So, when Willie reached Blaydon, and was shown into the library, where his aunt was lying upon a sofa near the fire, with an eider-down quilt over her knees, the first thing that she said to him, after returning some reassuring replies to his inquiries after her health, naturally was—

"I hope your mother has not bewitched you, Willie; she used to be rather clever at bewitching men in days gone by, I remember. To be sure, she was comparatively young then."

"She is my mother, you know," said Willie.

"Oh yes—and she has a grievance. I have thought it all over, and I have tried to make every allowance for her; we must forgive others if we hope to be forgiven. Still I cannot acquit her of heartlessness, and I cannot believe that she cares for you as we do. However, your own good sense

must be your guide. How many days do you intend to bestow upon us?"

Willie answered that he had formed no plans; his time was his own, and he wished to dispose of it, if he could, in such a manner as to content everybody. He would, no doubt, be expected to go back to Torquay, but personally he was not desirous of returning very soon. And when his aunt questioned him as to how he had employed himself there he did not mind telling her that he had fallen in with an old schoolfellow who had taken him out yachting, together with some other friends of his childhood, whom he mentioned by name.

Lady Brett was not much interested in Mr. Mortimer; but she pricked up her ears on being informed that Lady Evelyn Foljambe, whom she recollected to have seen as a child, had developed into a beautiful, clever, and charming woman, and a very mild process of cross-examination sufficed to let her into a secret which the guileless Willie had every intention of keeping to himself.

"You must not be too much afraid of this Mr. Mortimer," she said calmly at length. "As far as money goes—and of course it does go a long way—you are his equal, and I am sure you are superior to him in other respects."

"Oh, there's no question of that," answered Willie, somewhat red and confused, yet not altogether sorry to have been found out. "I think Lady Evelyn is going to marry Mortimer; but I really don't know. As for me, I don't suppose she would care a straw if she never saw me again."

Lady Brett laughed. "You are much too modest, my dear boy," said she; "you will have to go back to Torquay and try your luck. I wanted you to come here because—well, it was perfectly true that I was ill and that I might have died; but perhaps I had other reasons as well. However, I don't so much mind your going back now that I know what the attraction is; only there is one thing that I want to impress upon you, Willie—you must not lend more money to Mr. Archdale. Your uncle feels very strongly upon the subject; he has said to me more than once that he would never permit such a thing."

Willie made no reply. He had not lent money to Mr. Archdale, but to his mother, and he intended, if his mother should request him to do so, to lend her money again. Still there was no need to proclaim his intentions or to assert an independence which his uncle, after all, had no power to curtail. In his simplicity he did not

perceive what Lady Brett had understood at once, namely, that the hope of forming an aristocratic alliance would cause Sir George to overlook many acts of quasi-insubordination.

He was therefore both pleased and surprised by the extreme amiability of his uncle's manner during dinner. The old gentleman, who had not ceased with advancing years to take an active share in the management of the bank, had arrived from London by a late train and had had a talk with his wife which had given him satisfaction.

"Well, my boy," said he, "I'm glad to have you at home once more, even if it isn't to be a long visit this time. It's dreary work sitting down to dinner all alone every evening, and I'm afraid I shall hardly get your aunt into the dining-room again this year. And how are things going on in the regiment? Do the Plymouth people do their duty in providing you with plenty of amusement?"

This question was in itself evidence of unwonted good humour, for Sir George had always professed the deepest disdain for everything connected with a soldier's life in time of peace, and had affected to consider the regiment to which his nephew belonged quite beneath notice. Now, however, he listened with a condescending show of interest to

what Willie had to tell him about military matters and about such hunting as seemed likely to be obtainable in the far west. It was not until the servants had left the room that he drew his chair up to the fireside and started a subject of greater importance.

"So, young man," he began, "you've been losing your heart, I hear. Well, it's better to do that than to lose your head, as, upon my word, I think you were in some danger of doing a short time ago. A fool and his money are soon parted; but I don't call a man a fool for falling in love, because that is what no human being can help."

Sir George thought it necessary to qualify this generous admission by pointing out that a man who falls in love may be guilty of great folly, but that he is not so when the object of his affections happens to be an earl's daughter. And, as for Willie's modest protestations, he would have none of them.

"Oh, rubbish!" he exclaimed. "Who is this man Mortimer that you should bow down before him? Nothing but a country gentleman; which is what you yourself will be. With a larger income than his too, I dare say—unless you misbehave yourself. You will be a poorer-spirited

fellow than I take you for, Willie, if you give in to him without making a fight for it."

Willie's self-confidence was not greatly strengthened by this and other speeches couched in a similar strain of encouragement, but it was a relief to be spared any allusion to his mother, and a still greater relief to know that no opposition would be raised against his ultimate return to Devonshire. For it need scarcely be said that his absurd anxiety to quit Torquay had been followed by an equally absurd longing to revisit the scene of his disappointment.

"I have asked some of the neighbours to come over and shoot on Thursday," Sir George announced presently. "Perhaps I may give myself a holiday and look on. I shall not take out a gun, because, as you know, I am worse than useless; but I shall look to you to maintain the credit of the family."

Sir George had an idea that a host ought, if possible, to bring down more birds than his guests. All hosts are not of that opinion; but some perhaps are not sorry if, at the end of the day, they can show that, in spite of having taken the worst places, they can claim to have made the heaviest bag. So, on the following Thursday, he was secretly delighted by the success of his nephew,

who, without being a first-rate shot, was nevertheless a good deal better than any of his rivals. There are, as everybody knows, days on which it seems impossible to miss and other days on which it seems just as impossible to touch a feather. Probably what made Willie shoot so well was that he had not the slightest desire to distinguish himself. He aimed and fired mechanically; he was not thinking, except for a moment at a time, about pheasants or hares; and so, as not unfrequently happens, he achieved renown without any conscious striving after it. In the luncheon-hut (Sir George always provided his neighbours with a hot luncheon, accompanied by champagne), he was made a little uncomfortable by his uncle's ill-concealed triumph, which, as the afternoon progressed, reached an uncontrollable pitch.

"That fellow," Sir George confided to a squire of the vicinity, "can do anything in the world that he chooses to give his mind to; the only thing that stands in his way is his diffidence. I confess that I should have liked to put him into the bank, but perhaps, after all, it's as well as it is. He'll soon get tired of soldiering and settle down to a country life—for which I think he is adapted. He's a pretty fair hand at field-sports, as you see, and he won't lack the means to indulge his tastes —he won't lack the means."

The elderly gentleman to whom this crow was addressed, and who was out of temper by reason of having just brought down a runner, answered: "I suppose you know your own business best; but, if I had a nephew who was likely to succeed me, I shouldn't be in any hurry to make him drop his profession. Sport is all very well; but young fellows ought to have work as well."

"Oh, I'm quite aware of that," rejoined Sir George, not a whit disconcerted; "I shan't ask Willie to resign his commission until he marries. After that, the management of the estate will give him sufficient occupation. You can't expect a lady to follow the drum."

Indeed he was so pleased by the notion of pressing a lady of title to his avuncular bosom that he refused to believe in the obstacles which Willie instanced while they walked homewards together in the twilight.

"My good fellow," said he, "you can win if you are determined to win; all depends upon that. Look at me! I never had the half of your advantages; yet all my life through I have gained everything that I have resolved to gain. Don't tell me that it is an easier thing to hit a rocketing pheasant than to conquer a girl's heart; I've lived long enough to know better than that. I grant you

that Lady Wetherby will want to know what your prospects are. Well, you may tell her from me that they aren't very much worse than Mr. Mortimer's. I've looked him up in the Landed Gentry, and I can form a pretty shrewd guess at the relation which his rent-roll bears to his income."

"I don't think Lady Wetherby will ever have occasion to inquire about my prospects," answered Willie, smiling and shaking his head; "but, if she did, I should have to tell her that they were very doubtful, shouldn't I? At least, that is what you have always given me to understand."

Sir George walked on for some little distance in silence. When he once more opened his lips it was to deliver what had all the appearance of being a carefully weighed statement.

"A boy," said he, "may turn out well or badly. When that boy is not one's own son, one does not, unless one is an idiot, undertake to leave him a fortune which has been amassed by many years of hard work. But you are no longer a boy; your character is formed, and, if you have not always acted precisely as I should have wished you to act, you have given me no fair cause to complain of you. I think you ought now to know that you will inherit all I possess, subject, of course, to such

provision as I have made for your aunt's maintenance in the event of her surviving me. There is, I believe, one thing, and only one, which will induce me to alter my will. What that is, you are already aware."

"That one thing," observed Willie, "is just what may occur at any time."

"It *must* not occur," returned Sir George, stopping short and stamping his foot emphatically on the moist ground. "I think you will allow, Willie, that I have never played the tyrant with you. When you were under age and subject to my control, I thought it right to separate you from your mother, and to that arrangement she saw fit to consent. When you became your own master I did not, because I could not, forbid you to meet her; only I foresaw and I warned you what the result would be. My apprehensions have been fully verified. I understand that it is not easy to refuse a loan of a hundred pounds to your mother when she states that she is in want; yet you will have to refuse; for, if you don't, you may depend upon it that it will not be an hundred nor a thousand pounds that will satisfy her. Give way at the outset and these leeches will fasten upon you and fatten upon you until you or they die. You are a young man, so you don't believe me,

I dare say; but perhaps I, who am old, know the human race a little better than you do."

"I think you are unjust to my mother," said Willie, who could not deny that the remainder of Sir George's speech was reasonable enough.

"It may be so. I cannot forget your mother's history, and it is possible that I am prejudiced against a woman who has grossly insulted me, who was a bad wife to my brother, and whom I regard as having been the cause of his death. But, whether I am just or unjust to her, I am not likely to be mistaken as to the manner in which she and her spendthrift of a husband will act. They shall not have the squandering of my fortune, that is certain. In a word, my boy, you must make your choice between them and me. And let me remind you that, if you haven't the moral courage to say No when the next demand is made upon your purse, you will lose something more than a fortune. Lady Wetherby's jointure will die with her; she will not marry her daughter to a man who has only a small income of his own and a mother dependent upon him. Don't answer me; but put that all in your pipe and smoke it. Now, if you please, we'll drop the subject; I hope and trust that there will never be any need for us to reopen it."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FRIENDLY WARNING.

Sir George Brett must be allowed such merit as may be implied in the possession of sound common sense. He cherished, no doubt, an invincible grudge against Marcia; but he had not misread Archdale's character, and, if the danger of his very large fortune being dissipated by that thriftless gentleman was somewhat remote, nothing was more probable than that extensive inroads would eventually be made upon it if Willie's disposition to play into his step-father's hands were not nipped in the bud. And with that end in view Sir George had acted sensibly, saying neither too much nor too little, and impressing his nephew with a certain feeling of respect for him. Having fired his shot, he left well alone, nor did the name of Archdale pass his lips again during the remainder of Willie's visit. It was by his suggestion that that visit was brought to an end at the expiration of something under a fortnight.

"Now, my boy," he said good-humouredly one morning (for indeed he had continued to be in the best of humours all this time), "I know your heart is in Torquay, and you had better let your body follow it. Your aunt is gaining strength again now, and she is satisfied with the glimpse that she has had of you, and so am I. Old folks mustn't attempt to compete with beautiful young ladies. So be off as soon as you please, and good luck go with you! You may tell Lady Wetherby that she needn't feel any delicacy about writing to me and asking questions. I shall be glad to give her the fullest information, and I don't think she will find my replies unsatisfactory."

It was useless to reason with this confident old gentleman, and, in spite of himself, Willie could not help being to some extent infected by his sanguine spirit. Naturally, he did not look at the matter from his uncle's standpoint. He did not believe that the fact of his prospects being as good as Mortimer's would weigh for one moment with Lady Evelyn; yet that fact might very possibly have weight with her mother, and he had suspected all along that Lady Evelyn, being in love with nobody, was willing, out of sheer indifference, to marry the man of her mother's choice. But, after all, it was not a fact that his

prospects were as assured as Mortimer's. On the contrary, it was quite plain that they would be worth very little unless he was prepared to throw his mother overboard; and this led him to ask himself what he really intended to do with regard to his mother. It was a difficult question, which gave him ample food for reflection during his long journey westwards. Sir George, it might be assumed, was not far out in his prognostications. There would soon be a further request for money, followed by other requests — not, perhaps, for hundreds or thousands, but for such small sums as ladies who have to pay the tradespeople and whose husbands are of an extravagant disposition are apt to stand in need of. Could he turn a deaf ear to requests of that kind? He hardly thought that he could, although he realized the futility of acceding to them and the long price that he might be called upon to pay for his weakness. He could not bring himself to say to his mother, "It is out of the question for me to help you; because, if I do, I shall imperil my chance of becoming a rich man some day." So the only result at which he arrived was a forlorn hope that he might not be placed between the horns of the inevitable dilemma and a pardonable indignation against Archdale, who might have been earning a sufficient income, but was too lazy to do it.

His step-father, as it chanced, was the first person to greet him on his arrival at Torquay. As his fly turned in at the gates of the villa the indistinct forms of two gentlemen who had walked up the hill behind him emerged from the semi-darkness, and it was Archdale's mellow voice that said—

"So here you are again, Brett! Delighted to see you, though I suppose I musn't flatter myself that I am the magnet which has drawn you back to this dreary hole."

"How do you do?" answered Willie. He did not like the man, and he fancied that his tone had an ironical inflection which was, to say the least of it, uncalled for.

Mr. Archdale's companion now advanced, holding out a plump hand. By the light of the gas-lamp in the porch he was seen to be fat, elderly, grey-haired, and a little out of breath by reason of the ascent which he had just made.

"You don't remember me," he remarked. "Well, it would be strange if you did, though I remember you well enough, and we used to be pretty good friends once upon a time. Have you forgotten that evening when we thought you had drowned your mother in the Lago Maggiore, and Archdale wanted to eat you up, body and bones?

He wanted to eat me up the next morning, though goodness knows I had no hand in spiriting the pair of you away. Well, times are changed; I dare say he wouldn't quarrel with an old friend about such a trifle as that nowadays."

"I don't think you have changed much, Mr. Drake," answered Willie, laughing; "I should have recognized you in another minute."

But Mr. Drake, besides being a dozen years older, was in other respects an altered man. By great good luck he had come into an unexpected inheritance which sufficed to make his bachelor existence comfortable; and this, as was only natural, had exercised a sobering influence upon him. He no longer borrowed money of good-natured friends; his waist had become enlarged by several inches; he was on the committee of his club; he had ceased to play whist, except for sixpenny points; he went to church twice on Sundays, and led a blameless, useless, contented sort of life. It must, however, be added, to his credit, that he did not ignore favours received in past years, and that he had accepted Mr. Archdale's invitation to run down to Torquay for a day or two in spite of certain reasons that he had for wishing to decline that civility.

Willie thought him a pleasant old gentleman

enough, and was by no means sorry to have his company at dinner and through the evening. For his mother was in one of her most jealous and suspicious moods, and kept putting questions to him which he could not conveniently answer. What had the George Bretts said about her? Why had they consented to let him leave them? Was Caroline really ill, or only shamming? It was difficult for a young man who desired to tell nothing but the truth, yet not the whole truth, to reply to such queries, and the presence of Mr. Drake was some safeguard against their being pushed too far. He himself would fain have made a few inquiries, but he did not venture to do so, nor was any information volunteered about Lady Wetherby and her belongings. He had to comfort himself with the thought that no news is good news, and that, if Lady Evelyn had been engaged to Mortimer, the circumstance would surely have been considered worthy of mention.

After breakfast, the next morning, he was wandering round the garden, trying to keep a cigarette alight in the teeth of a gusty wind, when he was joined by Mr. Drake, and it soon became evident that that gentleman had something more to say than that the weather was abominable, and that London, after all, was far and away the best

place to be in while leaves were falling and south-westerly gales roaring in from the Atlantic every other day.

"Has our friend Archdale spoken to you at all about his affairs?" he inquired, after the above topics had been pretty well exhausted.

"No," answered Willie, "he hasn't yet. Are his affairs in a bad way?"

Mr. Drake shook his head. "Between you and me," said he, "I'm afraid they *are* in a bad way—in a deuced bad way. You aren't his son, so I hope you won't take offence at my speaking plainly about him, and the plain truth is that Archdale isn't fit to be trusted with a shilling. If he goes on like this, he'll be in the Bankruptcy Court before he's much older. I don't mean to say that he's dishonest, or that he can help being what he is; perhaps he can't. But I ask you, what's the use of lending money to a man who simply chucks it out of window and goes on living beyond his income as gaily as ever? One would be a fool to do such a thing even if one were a rich man—which I am not."

"Has he asked you to lend him money?" inquired Willie.

"Well, yes, he has. And I've done it too—more than once. I don't mind telling you that in old

days it was the other way about. I was a poor devil then, and he helped me out of difficulties; and the least that I could do, after I got possession of a little money of my own, was to repay him and to oblige him with a loan when he asked me. Still there are limits, you know. The moment that I read his letter, begging him to come down here, I guessed how it would be, and last night I had to meet him with a flat refusal. Not very pleasant; but what can one do? Dash it all! I ain't a gold-mine."

"I should have thought my mother's income and his own would have been sufficient to pay all the expenses of their present style of living," observed Willie, somewhat perturbed.

"My dear fellow, as far as I can make out, your mother has next to no income at all; her capital seems to have melted, and as for their present style of living, which Archdale calls 'pigging it,' it's quite another thing from the style in which they used to live abroad, I can tell you. The fact is, that Archdale has behaved like a perfect idiot. I believe his pictures don't sell as well as they once did; but if they fetched £5000 apiece it would be the same story. As soon as his purse is full he must needs empty it. I suppose it's his nature to be like that, just as it's his nature to be perpetually making a fool of himself about women."

"Does he do that?" asked Willie quickly.

"Oh, not to any criminal extent; but there's always a flirtation going on. There always was, and I should think there always will be, if he lives to be a hundred. It used to vex your mother; I don't know whether it vexes her still. However, what I wanted to say to you was this: I understand that you're well off and likely to be better off, and Archdale is bound to apply to you sooner or later. Well, if I were in your place, I wouldn't oblige him —I wouldn't really. It sounds an unfriendly sort of thing to say, but I'm persuaded that there's no good in trying to help a man of his stamp. As for me, I shall hook it. I've had letters this morning which compel me to return to London at once," added Mr. Drake, with a smile and a wink.

It was impossible to be angry with the man, for there could be no doubt that he meant kindly; but the humour of his admonition (which saves so many admonitions from being hopelessly stupid and impertinent) was lost upon Willie, who did not know that Mr. Drake had in former times been one of the most barefaced beggars in England, and who parted from his counsellor with a heavy heart.

It was partly because he did not wish to hear any more revelations about his mother's husband

and partly because he had an irresistible craving to hear something about other persons who were then sojourning in Torquay that he said he must run down to the post-office and buy some stamps. Being a man of his word, he duly went to the post-office and bought his stamps; but he did not encounter Lady Evelyn on the way, nor did he escape from the disquieting thoughts which Mr. Drake's remarks had brought into his mind. It was all very well for Mr. Drake to rap out a good, sturdy "no," and be recalled to London, but his own perplexities were not to be dealt with after that summary fashion. He could harden his heart against Archdale easily enough, but he could not harden it against his mother, and everything seemed to indicate the probability that he would ere long be guilty of an offence which Sir George Brett would never pardon. The worst of it was, too, that Sir George was in the right; for it was obviously absurd to pour water into a sieve, and what Mr. Drake had said only lent confirmation to what Willie himself had surmised.

After leaving the post-office he strolled down towards the harbour; possibly he had an unacknowledged curiosity to see whether the *Albatross* was still lying there. Torquay Harbour is not quite the most comfortable place in the world to lie in

when the stormy winds do blow, and by the late autumn most yachtsmen who have not had the sense to abandon what at best is but a doubtful pleasure at that season of the year have sought some quieter anchorage. Consequently there was no difficulty in identifying the solitary yawl which was pitching and rolling at her moorings under the inefficient shelter of the breakwater. Willie had been standing for some little time upon the quay, with his hands behind his back, watching her and wondering whether, if he stayed there long enough, he would be rewarded by obtaining speech of her owner, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, wheeling round, he was brought face to face with that fortunate personage.

Mortimer did not look as if he considered himself particularly fortunate at that moment. He had the appearance of being a thoroughly dejected man, and he presently explained that such was indeed his plight.

"If ever you want to get into the proper frame of mind for cutting your throat, Brett," said he, "let me recommend you to try yachting late in the year and bring up at Torquay. That'll make you wish you had never been born, or nothing will! Just look at that beastly tumbling sea—and this sort of thing has been going on for the last week

without a check! The glass is rising now; but I dare say that only means that we're in for a north-westerly gale. Well, I'm glad you're back, anyhow; it's something to be able to exchange a few words with a fellow-creature."

"But you have our friends at Malton Lodge," said Willie, somewhat surprised by this despondency.

"No, I haven't. At least, Lady Wetherby is there; but Lady Evelyn has been away for ten days, staying with somebody or other. She is expected back to-night, and to-morrow we are to have a last sail, I believe, if the weather permits —which it won't. Then I shall send the yacht round to Gosport to lay up, and precious glad I shall be to get rid of her, I can tell you."

It would not have been in human nature that Willie should feel any deep sympathy with this forsaken and disconsolate wooer; but he said, "I suppose you must have found it rather slow here of late."

"Slow!—my dear fellow, slow is no word for it! There literally hasn't been a thing to do, except sit in the club, and rap the barometer, and curse the weather, and try to sleep as much as possible. Besides, I've been bothered about—about things."

He looked as if he contemplated adding something more, but did not get farther than opening his lips once or twice, as he stood rolling about a pebble under his foot upon the coping of the quay.

"I'll tell you what I wish you would do," he resumed at length, looking up suddenly, "I wish you would come on board and lunch with me. You don't mind a bit of a roll, do you?"

"I don't think I very much like it," answered Willie doubtfully.

"Oh, you'll be all right; you won't notice it after the first few minutes; it's nothing to what we have been having. You might come, like a good chap. The fact is I rather want to have a chat with you, and it's impossible to talk out here, with the wind whistling through one's bones."

Now it required no great perspicuity to guess that the subject about which Mr. Mortimer was anxious to talk confidentially must be in some way connected with Lady Evelyn, and even at the risk of being sea-sick, Willie could not resist an invitation of that kind. So he said, "All right, then, I'll come. If the worst comes to the worst, I suppose you'll have the humanity to put me on shore before I disgrace myself."

## CHAPTER VII.

### MORTIMER IS CONFIDENTIAL.

Mortimer blew shrilly upon a whistle which he drew from his waistcoat pocket and received an answering signal from the yacht, whence a boat was at once lowered. A few minutes later he and his guest were standing upon the heaving deck of the *Albatross*, and Willie remarked, with calm resignation, "A quarter of an hour of this will about finish me, I expect."

"Oh, nonsense!" returned the other, "there isn't really any motion to speak of. Come below and have something to eat, and you'll soon forget that you aren't on dry land. We'll have some champagne, though, to make assurance doubly sure."

It may be doubted whether eating off a swinging table is a very good remedy for dizziness, but the virtues of champagne as a corrective have long been recognized by persons liable to sea-sickness, and Mr. Mortimer's champagne was of the best

quality. As much could not be said for the solid food set before his guest, which was cooked after a fashion to which all yachtsmen must learn to submit, whether they pay their cooks highly or not, because no other is obtainable. Such as it was, however, Willie found himself able to partake of it, and realized, to his great relief, that he was in no imminent danger of humiliating catastrophes. He was all the more glad of that because he was extremely curious to hear what was the nature of the confidence which Mortimer apparently meant to repose in him; so that it was a little disappointing to be catechized with regard to the sport that he had had in Kent and to listen to the vain regrets of a keen shot.

"To think that one should get so far on in the season as this without using a single cartridge!" sighed Mortimer mournfully. "Such a thing hasn't happened to me since I was a child. But this has been an exceptional sort of year all round. I don't want ever to spend another like it, I know that much."

He became more explicit—the champagne possibly helping to loosen his tongue—when luncheon had been disposed of. He then conducted his friend to a recess at the foot of the companion which had been fitted up as a smoking-room, with

a divan upon which recumbent smokers could wedge themselves into a position of comparative stability, and, having given him a cigar and lighted one himself, began—

"I suppose you know why I'm here now, Brett?"

"Yes," answered Willie slowly, "I suppose I do."

"Well, it's evident, of course. Nobody would come yachting to Torquay in the beginning of winter unless he had a pretty good reason for it. All the same, I'm beginning to doubt whether I haven't come here on a fool's errand after all. What do you think? You're an unprejudiced, disinterested outsider, and I should like to hear your opinion. Candidly now, what do you think?"

Willie could not disclaim the unprejudiced and disinterested character ascribed to him, but he professed himself quite incapable of forming a trustworthy judgment upon the question as to which he was consulted. "I don't exactly understand what you mean," he said. "I imagine that you are here on Lady Evelyn Foljambe's account; but I can't possibly tell whether she intends to accept you or not, if that is what you want to know. How could I? I'm not half as well acquainted with her as you are; and besides, I've been away."

"Oh yes, and so has she, for the matter of that.

I can't help fancying that she went away on purpose."

"But she is coming back this evening, you say."

"Yes, she is coming back this evening; she was bound to come back some time or other, you know. But I thought you might have heard or noticed something before you left. Did she ever speak to you about me?"

"She did once or twice," answered Willie, who remembered quite well what she had said and felt that it would not bear repetition, "but I didn't gather very much from that, one way or the other. I am really as much in the dark as you are."

"You must be hopelessly in the dark, then. Honestly speaking, I did believe that she cared for me last season in London. You may call me conceited if you like, but I think I had some excuse for believing that. She knew I was coming to Torquay in the autumn; she must have known why I was coming, and she certainly seemed to encourage me. So did her mother."

Willie made a murmur of assent.

"Ah, I see! You think her mother had more to say to that than she had, and I'm afraid you're right, Brett. Still, Lady Wetherby isn't a match-making old woman, and, when all's said, I'm no such extraordinary catch. I'm sure you're think-

ing a lot more than you choose to say. Speak out, like a good fellow; you won't offend me, I promise you."

This was really a most embarrassing request, and to comply with it, while at the same time steering clear of offensiveness, would have required more wit or duplicity than Willie could boast of. He got out of the difficulty by answering, "My thoughts don't matter; the only important question for you is what Lady Evelyn thinks, and you can't find that out without asking her. Why don't you?"

"Because, my dear fellow, she won't give me the chance. I suppose, if I've been upon the brink of proposing to her once, I've been upon the brink ten times, and each time she has contrived to put me off. You have no idea what a hand she is at that kind of thing. I believe I can stand chaff about as well as most people, but there are times, don't you know, when one doesn't want to be chaffed." Mortimer scratched the back of his head, tilting his yachting cap over his eyes, and added ruefully, "Hang me if I can make out what she's driving at!"

"The only plan is to ask her," said Willie again.

"Well, I suppose so; although I must confess that I don't feel very confident. It looks to me as

if she didn't wish to be driven into a corner—as if she hadn't quite made up her mind whether to say yes or no. And I suspect that that is what made her go away."

Willie opined that Lady Evelyn had now had time enough to ascertain her own wishes and that she might reasonably be requested to state them. "If it's a fair question, Mortimer," he ventured to ask in conclusion, "are you—are you very fond of her?"

Mortimer looked a little foolish. "Oh, of course," he answered. "One wouldn't want to spend the rest of one's life with a girl unless one was fond of her."

He jumped off his seat, ran up the companion and studied the weather for a moment. Then he returned, and, throwing himself down upon the divan again, resumed: "While I'm at it, I may as well tell the whole truth. I don't think I cared so very much about her in London; only I liked her, and I was under the impression that she liked me, and my people are always bothering me to marry. But since I have felt less sure of her it has been rather different. Oh, I'm in love with her right enough, if that's what you mean."

"Then," said Willie rather curtly—for, somehow or other, this information was something of a

disappointment to him—"all you have to do is to find out whether she is in love with you."

"Exactly so; and I'm very much afraid that she isn't. I don't know how or why it is; but she has certainly changed of late. I should understand it if she had been seeing other fellows; but she hasn't, you know. There isn't a soul in Torquay whom she could possibly have taken a fancy to, except yourself, and I dare say you won't think me insulting if I say that I see no reason to be afraid of you."

Willie managed to force out a laugh, though he felt his cheeks reddening. "I'm not very formidable," he answered; "ladies aren't much in the habit of becoming enamoured of me."

"Oh, I don't know why they shouldn't be," Mortimer declared generously; "I've no doubt they'd think you no end of a fellow if you took the trouble to be attentive to them; but you're hardly a ladies' man, are you? All I meant to say was that in this particular instance you are not to be dreaded. To be perfectly candid, I did for a moment imagine that there might be something between you and her; so I took an opportunity of asking her what she thought of you."

"And she set your mind at ease, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; she set my mind at ease. Not that

she said a word against you, you understand; on the contrary, she praised you up to the skies. Only one knows the sort of feeling that women have about a man whom they praise in that way. He's everything that you please as a friend; but he wouldn't exactly suit them as a husband."

Having thus incidentally crushed the life out of any insane hopes that may have been rising in the breast of his confidant, Mr. Mortimer proceeded: "The long and the short of it is, then, that you advise me not to shilly-shally any longer? You don't think I should improve my chances by waiting a bit."

Willie was able to reply honestly that he should recommend prompt action. If Lady Evelyn had not yet made up her mind, it did not seem likely that further delay could bring her nearer to a decision.

Mortimer nodded. "All right," said he; "the deed shall be done to-morrow, if only this vile wind will moderate. You might be good-natured and come with us—will you? Then you could entertain the old lady, as you did before, you know, and I could find an occasion to say my little say and have done with it."

Good-natured as he was, Willie demurred to this unpalatable proposition.

"You will get on all right without me," he answered; "Lady Wetherby is on your side, and she isn't likely to thrust her company upon you."

"Oh, she will be quite willing to make herself scarce," agreed Mortimer; "I know that. It's Lady Evelyn whom I'm doubtful about. I'm as certain as I sit here that she doesn't want to be brought to bay, and there's no getting rid of third persons unless the whole three are of one mind. If you were with us, you could easily lend me a helping hand, don't you see."

To such an appeal only one response was possible, and indeed it did not greatly signify. If one is to be condemned to inevitable suffering one may as well be present when sentence is passed as not. Willie, therefore, accepted the humble task of usefulness assigned to him, and having done so, rose, saying that it was time for him to be off. Mortimer, however, was very unwilling to let him go. He had to admit that he had nothing particular to do, and, as a result of that admission he had to listen for another hour to confidences which he would fain have dispensed with. With unintentional cruelty, Mortimer expatiated upon Lady Evelyn's many charms and good qualities, protesting his complete faith in her, notwithstanding all that he had heard about her heartlessness.

"She isn't a flirt in reality," he was good enough to explain; "but I suppose that, like all women, she has a hankering after admiration, and very likely she sees no harm in giving a certain amount of encouragement to fellows who haven't serious intentions and whom she wouldn't dream of marrying if they had. Only I have always fancied that she treated me rather differently from the others. Of course I may be quite wrong, though; what do you think yourself?"

This question was repeated in one form or another again and again, to the discomfiture of poor Willie, who kept on answering that he really knew nothing about it. It was rather hard upon him that he should be asked to cheer the spirits and allay the misgivings of a rival who seemed to have every chance of success. His patience almost broke down when he was begged to say quite honestly whether he believed Lady Evelyn capable of consenting to arrangements made on her behalf by her family, without regard to her personal predilections.

"Because I don't want to be accepted on those terms, you know," Mortimer declared. "I'd a good deal rather be told straight out that she liked me well enough, but didn't care for me in the way that I care for her."

"How can I possibly judge of her feelings!" exclaimed Willie. "From the little that I have seen of her, I should think that if you asked her she would answer you truly; but you yourself say that I am not a ladies' man. If you are in the dark, it stands to reason that I must be much more so."

At length he was permitted to depart; and dismal enough were his reflections after he had been put ashore and had started on the uphill road which led towards his mother's house. Setting one consideration against another, the evidence of facts doubtless told in Mortimer's favour. Lady Evelyn might have gone away out of coquetry, or simply because she had thought that a little change of scene would be agreeable; but it was perfectly plain that if she had intended to refuse her suitor, she would have allowed him to propose to her and have got rid of him. Hesitation may mean fifty things, but it cannot mean a negative decision. As for himself, he was convinced now, if he had not been so before, that he was nothing more to her than a casual and rather pleasant acquaintance. Mortimer's report of the manner in which she had spoken about him was conclusive upon that point.

He might or might not have been in some

measure comforted if he could have overheard a conversation which was at that moment taking place between Lady Evelyn and her mother. The girl, who had just arrived from her journey, was seated beside the tea-table, with her hat and jacket on, and had been informed that, should the weather prove propitious on the morrow, she would be expected to pay a farewell visit to the *Albatross*. The announcement apparently did not please her; for she made an impatient gesture and exclaimed—

"What a miserable want of originality! I should have thought that in all this time Mr. Mortimer might have hit upon some new idea. I don't think I was ever so tired of anything in my life as I am of sailing round Torbay in that yacht."

"I am sure you can't dread the prospect half so much as I do, my dear," answered her mother rather dolefully. "You at least are a good sailor, whereas I am a disgracefully bad one. Even if the wind drops, as it seems to be doing, one can't expect that horrible sea to have quieted down by to-morrow."

"But if you don't want to go, and I don't want to go, why on earth are we going?" Lady Evelyn inquired.

"Oh, I think we ought. Mr. Mortimer only came to Torquay on our account, you must re-

member, and I am afraid he has found it very dull while you have been away; and—and it is the last time that he will ask us to go out sailing with him, you see."

"Yes; there is a grain of consolation in that thought. Moreover, if we didn't go out sailing with him, he would come to luncheon here and stay the whole afternoon, I suppose. All the same, I wish we could get hold of some amiable fourth person to square the party. Mr. Brett would have been invaluable; but he is still away, isn't he?"

"I believe he has returned," answered Lady Wetherby, a momentary cloud overspreading her good-humoured face; "his mother was here this afternoon, and she told me that he had come back. But I don't think I will ask him to join us in another yachting excursion: he didn't enjoy himself very much the last time."

"Didn't he?" asked Lady Evelyn innocently. "I'm sure it was no fault of yours or mine if he didn't; for we both tried our little best to entertain him. What makes you think that he found us tedious?"

Lady Wetherby laughed. "I didn't say he had found us tedious; I said he didn't enjoy himself, and I doubt whether he would enjoy a repetition of

the dose, poor boy! Anyhow, I can't invite him; the *Albatross* doesn't belong to me."

"I shouldn't feel the slightest scruple about inviting him if I wanted him," observed Lady Evelyn pensively; "but after all, I don't know that I do particularly want him. Anybody else would do quite as well. Perhaps Mr. Archdale might be induced to honour us with his company."

Lady Wetherby thought not. "From what I hear," said she, "Mr. Archdale prefers playing whist at the club to doing anything else. Besides, we couldn't very well ask him without Marcia."

"In that case," said Lady Evelyn, "perhaps we had better not ask him. I can't understand how such a nasty woman as Mrs. Archdale ever contrived to have such a nice son as Mr. Brett."

"She isn't so very nasty and he isn't so very nice," returned her mother. "You jump to conclusions about people much too hastily, my dear."

"Do I? Well, you can't accuse me of having jumped hastily to any conclusion about Mr. Mortimer, who is neither nasty nor nice, handsome nor ugly, clever nor stupid. The only positive thing that I can discover about him is his income; but I suppose that is the most important thing that can be discovered about anybody, isn't it?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ROUGH-WEATHER SAILING.

When the autumnal equinox is over and the south-westerly gales have blown themselves out, the wind commonly veers towards the north or west, and in favourable years there follows a period of still sunny days and starry nights, with a touch of frost in the air. In unfavourable years (these are perhaps the more numerous) sharp squalls of wind and rain sweep in from the same quarter, alternating with bright intervals, a condition of things tolerable enough to people on dry land who carry umbrellas, but full of discomfort for those whom the pursuit of business or pleasure tempts to sail upon the sea. Now, the day which Mr. Mortimer had fixed upon as the last of his nautical career for that season was of the latter uncertain type. There was no denying that it was a fine morning; but over the distant hills of Dartmoor there hung a black cloud, with sun-rays streaming up above it and an ominous grey appearance below it; so

that Lady Wetherby, as she stood upon the terrace in front of her villa and anxiously surveyed the horizon, shading her eyes with her hand, heaved a deep sigh.

"I suppose it will do," she observed to her daughter; "one can't very well say that it won't do. Only I am certain that as soon as we are well out to sea something horrible will happen."

"Then we'll stay at home," answered Lady Evelyn decisively. "We would do a great deal to please Mr. Mortimer—that's understood—but I don't see why we should run the risk of being drowned to please him."

"Oh, I dare say there isn't much danger of that," rejoined her mother; "the *Albatross* is seaworthy, I believe, and there is no appearance of a storm approaching. But unfortunately something very far short of a storm will suffice to make me quite indifferent to the prospect of death. There's no help for it, my dear; go we must. All I beg of you is that you will not ask me to remain on deck. It is just wildly possible that, by lying on the flat of my back in the cabin and shutting my eyes, I may manage to pull through."

So the messenger whom Mr. Mortimer had despatched from the yacht, and who was waiting for a reply, was sent away with a verbal intimation

to the effect that the ladies would be at the landing-steps in about twenty minutes, and the elder of them prepared herself to undergo one of those forms of martyrdom to which all good mothers must occasionally submit for their daughters' sake. If in this instance the daughter of the martyr was far from grateful, there was nothing surprising or unusual about her ingratitude: few people understand what their true interests are, and fewer still return thanks to those who endeavour to promote them.

During the drive down to the quay Lady Evelyn was taciturn and depressed; she seated herself in the gig with the half-resigned, half-impatient air of one who foresees annoyance, and, as the men gave way, she remarked gloomily: "Well, we are in for it now! I only hope that, whatever comes of this, nobody will be so unfair as to blame me. *I* didn't want to go to sea to-day."

However, she brightened up wonderfully when she stepped on board and recognized the figure of Willie Brett, stationed a few paces behind the owner of the vessel. "This is really kind of you!" she exclaimed, shaking hands cordially with the young man. "I know you can't be here for pleasure—no mortal could. So I shall take the liberty of assuming that you came out of sheer

charity and because you realized that Mr. Mortimer would be much too busy sailing the ship to waste time in entertaining me."

And it pleased her to maintain this preposterous assumption, notwithstanding all the assurances to the contrary that she received from those who were in a position to speak authoritatively. In vain Mortimer protested that he had nothing whatsoever to say to the navigation of the *Albatross;* in vain Willie, true to the distasteful task which he had undertaken, endeavoured to efface himself: there is no permissible method of shaking off a lady who is determined to cling to you, and Lady Evelyn did not conceal her determination.

"Go away and steer," she said to Mortimer, as soon as they were out of the harbour. "You want to steer—you know you do! Added to which, I want to talk to Mr. Brett in private, so that there isn't the slightest excuse for your remaining with us against your will."

Mortimer laughed rather ruefully, shrugged his shoulders and walked aft. The day, to be sure, was still young, and he presumed that his opportunity would come later. But Willie, who was thus left in what seemed to be an enviable situation (for Lady Wetherby had lost no time in going below), was not much elated by it. For all his

innocence, he could not but perceive that this openly avowed desire for his company was not really flattering.

"What do you want to talk to me about in private, Lady Evelyn?" he inquired, with a somewhat melancholy smile.

"That is just what I don't know," she replied candidly. "However, I dare say I shall be able to think of something presently, and in the mean time we have got rid of our genial host, whom I don't wish to have upon my hands for the entire day. Why are you back in Torquay, if one may ask? Have you made your peace with your uncle, or have you quarrelled with him?"

"I haven't quarrelled with him," answered Willie, a little surprised; "I should be very sorry to do that."

"Oh, you would? I didn't know. Of course you are quite right, and it is a dreadful mistake to quarrel with one's bread and butter; only I fancied somehow that you were the sort of person to throw away a fortune for an idea."

"How do you mean?" inquired Willie.

"I only mean that, from what I have heard, you are doing rather a risky thing in irritating that old uncle of yours. I suppose your returning

here, instead of staying with him, irritates him, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I hope not. He isn't on speaking terms with my mother, and perhaps he would be better pleased if she were not upon speaking terms with me; but he has been quite reasonable about it. He made conditions, as he had every right to do; but I think he understands that some allowance must be made for human nature."

"Well, if you have persuaded him that it is a part of human nature to revolt against arbitrary interference, that is very clever of you, and I trust he will leave you his money, notwithstanding your obstinacy. The one essential thing for all of us appears to be that we should get hold of money: so long as we do that, we may make idiots of ourselves in other ways to our hearts' content."

Willie said that was not at all his view of the whole duty of man—or woman.

"It's mine, then. At least, I think it is. Ignoble, if you like, but necessary; and a good deal more necessary in the case of women than in the case of men. Men, after all, can earn their own living; but women, or at any rate women of my class, can't, and we are always taught that it is our chief duty to marry rich men. Mamma is as unworldly as anybody whom I have ever met;

yet I know that that is her opinion, and that she will be grievously disappointed if I don't act up to it."

"Do you mean to act upon it?" Willie could not help asking.

"Am I bound to answer that question, Mr. Brett?"

"Of course not. Only I think you rather invited it?"

"Oh dear, no; I was only inviting you to answer it for me. But you aren't polite enough, or else you are too honest. Well, I know what you think, and I dare say you are right. I shall probably end by doing my duty. As far as that goes, I shall probably begin by doing it."

Nobody could speak more plainly, and it seemed to Willie that such candour fully entitled him to state in general terms what his views were with regard to loveless marriages. This he proceeded to do at some length and with no little earnestness, forgetting in the ardour of the controversy which ensued that he had not been invited to join the *Albatross* that day in order that he might engross the whole attention of the lady on whose account alone the yacht had left her moorings.

Lady Evelyn, for her part, seemed to be equally oblivious of the ill-used and impatient man at the

wheel. She argued with a good deal of dexterity, and although she admitted the desirability of love-matches in the abstract, she gave it to be understood that she regarded them rather as lucky accidents than as objects to be aimed at.

"Don't look so shocked and distressed," said she; "we are what we have been brought up to be, and I wasn't trained in a romantic school."

Willie sighed. "You don't speak as if you very much liked the school in which you were brought up," he ventured to remark.

"Oh, I like it or I dislike it—what does it matter? I am what I am, and things are what they are, and we can't change them. Perhaps we have discussed the question long enough now."

They had certainly been discussing it for a good long time. The *Albatross*, running before a fresh breeze, was well out to sea, and Mortimer, who had been vainly endeavouring to catch his friend's eye, contrived to do so now. He made an expressive grimace, which was rightly interpreted in the quarter to which it was addressed as meaning that this sort of thing was rather more than had been bargained for. Willie responded by a slight movement of his shoulders and eyebrows. It was no fault of his that he had been detained in a conversation which he had not

sought; still he felt a little guilty about it, and it seemed to him that his obvious duty was to efface himself. He therefore rose somewhat abruptly from the wicker chair in which he had been seated, murmuring something about its being time for him to take his share of the work. As a matter of fact, he did not gain possession of the tiller, because the skipper, who advanced at the same moment, would not allow him to do so; but the effect of his manœuvre was to release Mortimer, and how could he help it if Lady Evelyn chose immediately to disappear down the companion?

"You see how it is," said Mortimer disconsolately, when the two young men were left on deck together; "she is evidently determined not to give me a chance if she can help it. Between you and me, Brett, I've half a mind to chuck the whole thing up; goodness knows I don't want to force myself upon anybody."

And, as his friend remained silent, he continued with a touch of irritability, "What do you think yourself? What has she been talking about to you all this time? Did she mention me?"

"Not by name," answered Willie hesitatingly.

"Oh, she did mention me by implication, then? I thought as much! Well, you know, if it comes

to her discussing me with outsiders, it's pretty plain that she can't care about me personally, and I'm sure I don't want to be accepted for any other reason. She told you that she was being urged to marry me by her mother, I suppose?"

"No, she didn't say that," answered Willie, endeavouring to combine truth with discretion. "Somehow or other, I don't quite remember how, we got on the subject of marriage, and she talked as though income were the only important consideration. But I really don't know whether she meant what she said, and perhaps she wasn't thinking about you at all. Hadn't you better go below and ask her? I'm sure she will be honest with you if you do."

Mortimer was not quite so confident about that. Rightly or wrongly, he conceived that Lady Evelyn had given him a great deal of encouragement, and that her present conduct was not only capricious but unfair. He was disinclined either to give her the cheap triumph of having brought him to her feet and refused him or to accept a success due solely to his rent-roll and his highly respectable position in society. However, it need scarcely be said that he eventually acted upon the advice offered to him and descended into the main cabin, leaving Willie to study the appearance of the sky

and the sea, which was becoming more and more threatening.

Little enough did Willie care about the black, ragged cloud which was sweeping over Paignton and the white-crested waves by which the bay astern was beginning to be covered, though he stared at these portents as if they interested him profoundly. He knew, or thought he knew, very well what was going on beneath his feet at that moment. Lady Wetherby had made herself scarce —of course she would make herself scarce— Mortimer was pleading his cause; Lady Evelyn was laughing and pretending to be sceptical—was perhaps really feeling sceptical. But presently her scepticism would be vanquished; she would realize that her lover was a good, kind-hearted fellow, that his love was not to be lightly rejected by one who, at all events, loved no one else better; she would yield more or less reluctantly, and in a minute or two Mortimer would come up on deck, with a radiant countenance, to announce that it was "all right."

Nothing, in truth, was more probable than the verification of this forecast; yet, when Mortimer reappeared, his countenance was anything but radiant, and all he had to announce was that they must put back to Torquay at once.

"The old lady's sick," said he briefly and rather sulkily. "I don't see that there's much excuse for it; but sick she is, and though she swears she doesn't mind, Lady Evelyn insists upon her being put ashore. Well, I suppose it would be inhuman to refuse. Besides, Lady Evelyn won't leave her."

He gave the requisite instructions and sharply countermanded his skipper's orders to shorten sail. "The sooner we get back into smooth water the better," he said; "there's a nasty squall coming up which sea-sick people wouldn't like. We may just escape it if we look sharp."

"I doubt we shan't escape it, sir," answered the skipper; "and we're bound to carry away something if it catches us."

"I don't care if we carry away the mainmast," returned Mortimer impatiently; "you won't be held responsible, anyhow. Mind your head, Brett; we're going about."

Like many other good-humoured men, Mortimer was not disposed to tolerate opposition on those rare occasions when his good humour deserted him. His subordinates were doubtless aware of that; otherwise he would hardly have been permitted under such a spread of canvas to steer as straight as the wind would allow for the black cloud which was now rushing towards them across

the water and which there was not the smallest probability of their avoiding. Indeed, ten minutes had not elapsed before the squall was upon them and the skipper's prophecy had been fulfilled.

What with the roaring of the wind, the driving rain and the showers of blinding spray, the few moments which followed were moments of confusion and bewilderment both for Mortimer and for the two ladies, who, startled by the sudden heeling over of the vessel and the crash of the falling topmast, had rushed up on deck to see what was the matter. Mortimer had to assure them that they were not in any danger and that nothing worse had happened than the loss of a little gear, which was of no consequence at all. Something worse had happened; but neither he nor they were aware of it until the deck had been cleared of the broken spar and the tangle of rigging which had come down with it. Then they saw that four of the hands were stooping over something or somebody, and Mortimer said, "Hullo! where's Brett? I hope he hasn't been hurt."

He hurried forward, followed by the ladies; though he waved them back, wishing to spare them a sickening spectacle. Willie lay under the bulwarks, where he had fallen, drenched with salt water. His face was covered with blood, his head,

which the men had raised a little, had fallen back, his eyes were vacant and glazed.

"Good God!" ejaculated Mortimer involuntarily, "he's dead!"

"I think he's still breathin', sir," one of the men said, "and the blood don't seem to have stopped flowin'."

But if this was not actual death, it was so near an approach to it as to be to all intents and purposes the same thing. A man whose skull has been split open is a dead man, whether he continues to breathe for a while or not, and so Lady Evelyn must have thought; for in the presence of such a calamity she became oblivious of everything and everybody else.

"Oh, my love!" she exclaimed, as, with clasped hands and dilated eyes, she gazed down upon the motionless figure at her feet.

Her mother heard her; so did Mortimer, and so did the crew. But she would not at that moment have cared if all the world had heard her; nor indeed were her neighbours in a mood to be shocked by any breach of conventionality. So strong is our instinctive clinging to the existence which we must all resign sooner or later, and so terrible does the premature death of a fellow-mortal appear to us, that when so great

a catastrophe seems to be imminent, all other considerations sink into comparative insignificance in our eyes. In Mortimer's head, at all events, there was for the time being only room for one idea, and probably Lady Wetherby felt very much as he did, although calmer reflection might have persuaded both of them that, if Willie Brett was dead, the misfortune was not quite the worst that could have fallen upon them.

Willie, however, was not yet dead. He was perhaps going to die; but as to that they could form no opinion. They got him down into the cabin and washed the deep, jagged wound upon his head, and forced some brandy between his white lips; more than that their scant knowledge of surgery did not enable them to do. He remained rigid and unconscious, and they could but trust that they had not, through ignorance, neglected any means of restoring animation which ought to have been resorted to.

Lady Evelyn neither gave assistance nor was asked for any. She had sunk down upon a chair, where she sat, unnoticed, staring straight before her in a dazed way, with her hands still tightly clasped. She only spoke once, when she inquired how long they would be in getting back to Torquay.

"I don't know," answered Mortimer, glancing

at her and knitting his brows wonderingly for an instant; "not very long, I hope. But I'll run up on deck and have a look at the weather."

The weather by this time had temporarily improved. The squall had passed out to sea, the sun was shining, and there was a brisk wind, although, unfortunately, it was a contrary one. The *Albatross* had suffered no damage beyond the loss of her topmast, and was making good headway; so that Mortimer, when he went below again, could give an encouraging report to the anxious ladies.

Nevertheless, an interval which seemed to them interminable elapsed before Torquay harbour was made; after which they had to endure another weary half-hour of waiting. But at length a doctor, who by good luck had been recognized and stopped near the quay, was brought on board, and his verdict, when he had made a hasty examination of the patient, was not such as to exclude all hope.

"To the best of my belief," said he, "the injuries are not in themselves fatal; of course I can't tell yet what the effect of the shock to the system may be. We must have him carried home and put to bed as soon as possible. Perhaps somebody will go on and prepare his

friends. I think you said that his mother is living here?"

"I suppose I had better go," observed Mortimer, with a rueful countenance.

But Lady Wetherby, who during all this time had forgotten the existence of such a malady as sea-sickness, and had behaved like the excellent and courageous creature that she was, unhesitatingly took upon herself a task which anybody might have been pardoned for shirking. "It will be easier for me to break the news to poor Marcia than it would be for you," she said; "if you give me five minutes' start, that will be quite enough, because you will have to drive slowly." She added, in a lower voice, "I shall put Evelyn into a fly and send her straight home; she is too much upset to be of any use to you."

Lady Evelyn acquiesced without a word when she was told what was to be done with her, and as soon as the two ladies had left the yacht, the doctor remarked, "Now, that is what I call a good, sensible woman. I only hope the poor young fellow's mother may be like her."

"As far as I can judge, Mrs. Archdale isn't at all like Lady Wetherby," Mortimer answered. "However, I suppose it won't very much matter if she does make a scene. He won't recover

consciousness for another hour or so, will he?"

"Oh dear, no; there isn't the slightest chance of that. Indeed, now that we are alone, I may tell you that it is doubtful whether he will ever recover consciousness at all."

## CHAPTER IX.

### SIR GEORGE AS A DIPLOMATIST.

In times of emergency people who usually pass for being rather weak and silly, are apt to astonish their betters, and Marcia's behaviour earned her golden opinions from the doctor and Mortimer when they arrived at her villa with their helpless charge. She was very pale, but she evidently realized that, if she was to be of any use, she must keep her nerves under control, and she did what she was told to do quietly and silently. Also she and Lady Wetherby had made such preparations as were necessary; so that the patient was very soon placed under conditions as favourable to his recovery as any conditions could be.

The doctor, however, declined to commit himself to any statement as to the probability of recovery. "It is very natural that you should ask me the question, my dear madam," he said to Marcia, not unkindly, "and you are so composed and sensible that I would willingly tell you

the truth if I knew it. Only it is quite impossible for me or anybody else to know it yet. I should like, if you please, to have a second opinion; but I must warn you that at the best you will have to make up your mind to some days of uncertainty. That much is inevitable."

Nevertheless, the result of the consultation which was held that evening was, upon the whole, satisfactory, and when, on the following morning, her son began to show signs of returning consciousness Marcia, for one, felt sure that he would live. Certainly, if careful nursing can keep life in a man, Willie had every chance given to him; for nothing could have exceeded his mother's patient and unwearied devotion. Neither by day nor by night could she be persuaded to leave his bedside; she seemed able to dispense with sleep; she displayed a marvellous intuitive knowledge of all that he wanted; and when by slow degrees his reason came back to him, she was more than rewarded by his helpless reliance upon her and by the faint smile which from time to time gave evidence of his gratitude. She felt that her boy was once more hers and hers alone. Of course he would get well and strong again; and then, perhaps, remembering these dark days, he would understand what apparently he had not altogether

understood of late, that her love for him had never suffered change or diminution.

Perhaps it was because they knew him to be in such admirable and competent hands that his friends at Malton Lodge abstained from calling personally at the house. They sent every day to inquire how he was going on, and received replies which presumably contented them. At any rate, they were not missed by Marcia, while Willie, for his part, was too weak and confused to think at all. He had no recollection of the accident; he realized very little more than that he was ill and desperately tired and that his mother was taking care of him. When at length he was pronounced out of danger and could talk for a few minutes at a time, and when the pain in his head became less wearing, he began to enjoy this irresponsible, irreflective, dependent sort of existence, which was very much like a return to childhood. He asked no questions; he was perfectly satisfied to lie there and be nursed and kissed and made comfortable. Only he was dimly aware of being on the old terms with his mother, which was perhaps as great a source of happiness to him as to her.

But naturally such a state of things could not last, and one day, while Marcia was sitting beside him, waiting patiently for him to open his eyes,

he said: "Tell me all about it, mother. Have I had brain fever, or what has it been?"

"No, dear; you have had an accident," Marcia answered; "but we needn't talk about it yet."

"I want to know, though," he returned, with some of the petulance which belongs to convalescence. "I can't remember any accident. We are at Torquay, aren't we?—and I have no horses here."

"It wasn't a hunting accident," Marcia explained; "you were hurt on board Mr. Mortimer's yacht. I can't tell you exactly what happened, because I haven't seen Laura Wetherby since she came to break the news to me, and I didn't pay very much attention to what she said at the time; but I think it was the mast, or a bit of the mast, that was broken off by the wind and fell upon you. Really people ought not to have such flimsy masts!"

"Or such flimsy skulls," Willie suggested, smiling.

He resumed, after a pause: "I think I am beginning to get hold of it now. I went out sailing with them, and we had to put back because Lady Wetherby was sea-sick, wasn't that it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Marcia; "I didn't ask for particulars. All they told me was

that you had been more than half killed; and there's no harm in my saying now that you have been very near death. Oh, my own dear Willie, if you only knew how thankful I am, and how frightened I have been!"

For the first time during his illness she broke down and burst into tears. Willie also had tears in his eyes, which, considering his weak state of health, did not, perhaps, disgrace his manhood; and, naturally enough, the current of his ideas was diverted by the embraces and assurances of mutual love which, as a matter of course, followed. But currents which have been diverted return inevitably in the long run to their original set; so that an interval of twenty minutes or so sufficed to bring the invalid back to the point of inquiring: "Have you any news to give me about Lady Evelyn?"

Marcia drew back at once and her voice changed. "I suppose you want to know whether she is going to marry that man or not," said she. "I haven't heard anything about it; but I should think she would marry him. Would you care so very much if she did?"

Willie made no reply for several moments; but at last he said: "I hope she won't. I can't believe that she is really fond of him."

"That means that you are fond of her. I was afraid of it, and I am very, very sorry that it is so. Oh, Willie, how can you be so foolish! The girl is neither pretty, nor nice, nor—nor anything! If she has encouraged you, that is only because she is greedy of admiration, as almost all girls are. But what is the use of talking? I should never convince you that I care a thousand times more for your little finger than she does for your whole body. Parents give and children take—that is one of the unalterable laws of nature, no doubt."

In all probability it is; yet some parents give more than others, and some children are exceptionally grateful. Willie, at all events, was not insensible to his mother's loving care of him, nor was he disposed to cavil at the somewhat unreasonable form which her affection seemed to be taking. He had always understood her pretty well and, although he himself was not of a jealous temperament, he could make allowance for those who were otherwise constituted.

"It is quite possible to love more than one person at a time," he said quietly. "One loves different people in different ways, I suppose; but I know I shall never love anybody in the world in just the same way as I love you, mother. At

one time I did think that you had forgotten me; but I shan't think so again, you may be sure. As for Lady Evelyn, she never gave me any encouragement at all; she was friendly and nothing more. I shall be sorry if she marries Mortimer, because, as I tell you, I don't believe she is really fond of him; but I am certain that she has not for one moment dreamt of marrying me."

"So am I," Marcia declared, rather cruelly. "Still you don't deny that you have dreamt of marrying her."

Everybody, surely, has a right to his dreams, however preposterous these may be, and Willie was about to put in a plea to that effect, when a knock at the door called his mother away.

While this colloquy—which, it must be admitted, was hardly of a nature to soothe the nerves of a convalescent—had been going on, another had been taking place downstairs between Mr. Archdale and a very unexpected visitor. Poor Archdale had had a bad time of it since his stepson's accident. No attention whatever had been bestowed upon his personal comfort; his existence had been virtually ignored, and the quality of the dinners set before him had deteriorated in a most heartrending manner. He had made no complaint—partly, no doubt, because he had had

nobody but Flossie to complain to—but he did feel that he was being rather hardly used, and he trusted that, as soon as Willie's broken head should be healed, the young man would see the propriety of taking himself off. Hospitality, after all, does not mean the keeping of a private hospital.

Now it came to pass that, just as he was inwardly debating whether it would not be right and kind to address a few lines to Blaydon Hall and to give other people a chance of helping to nurse the sick man, a card was brought to him which seemed quite like an answer to his unspoken prayer. He had not imagined that avuncular solicitude would bring Sir George Brett all the way down to Torquay; but, since such was apparently the case, he congratulated himself and hurried out into the hall to extend a warm welcome to the new-comer.

"I am delighted to see you, Sir George," said he. "It is many years since we last met."

Sir George, who was holding his hat and stick in his right hand, may have thought that it would be rude to offer his left to Mr. Archdale. At all events he abstained from doing so and answered curtly: "Yes, a good many years. Is it true that my nephew is lying in this house in a critical condition?"

"Please come in and sit down," said Archdale. "No, I believe that your nephew's condition is no longer considered to be critical, though he has had a narrow squeak for it. I suspect that for the first two days the doctors thought it was all up with him; but he has turned the corner now, and perhaps a change of air, as soon as he is fit to travel——"

"I must say," observed Sir George, who had remained standing, "that I think a most extraordinary want of consideration has been shown for his aunt and myself. It was by mere chance that I heard of his accident through a paragraph in a weekly newspaper. Pray, sir, would you have thought it necessary to inform me of the circumstance if my nephew had died?"

"Undoubtedly I should," replied Archdale urbanely; "indeed, to tell you the truth, I was just thinking of writing to you when your card was given to me. I quite feel that you are entitled to an apology, though perhaps not from me personally, because I am a mere cipher in this house, and, as I have scarcely seen my wife since that unlucky day, I have had no means of knowing what has been done or left undone. Do sit down."

Sir George deposited himself upon a chair with an air of protest and reluctance. He hated hold-

ing any parley with this man; but he had had a long journey and a terrible fright, and he was beginning to feel very tired. He said: "I should like to see my nephew for a few minutes. There is no objection to my doing so, I presume?"

"None whatever, that I am aware of," answered Archdale. "I'll ring and tell somebody to let my wife know that you are here. Meanwhile, you'll have some tea or—or a brandy and soda or something, won't you?"

Sir George rather stiffly declined any refreshment, but said he would be glad to hear a more detailed account of the accident than had come to his knowledge through the press. He was not, of course, told of one incident connected therewith which would have given him unfeigned satisfaction, because no revelation upon that delicate subject had been made to his informant; yet, while he listened, his features relaxed, for he was thinking to himself that worse luck may befall a diffident suitor than to be half killed before the eyes of the beloved one. He did not care to put more queries than he could help to Mr. Archdale, nor did he gratify that ill-used personage by intimating any intention of removing his nephew from the premises; but when he was conducted upstairs and encountered Marcia upon

the landing, he unbent so far as to shake hands with her.

"I confess, Mrs. Archdale," said he, "that I am amazed at your having neglected to communicate with me either by telegram or letter; still it is, I suppose, possible that this may have been due as much to anxiety and preoccupation as to heartlessness, and I feel that we owe you some thanks for your careful nursing of our poor boy."

He really meant to be gracious to a woman whom he disliked; but, as may be imagined, his words were not relished by Marcia, who flushed angrily.

"He is *not* your poor boy," she returned, "and I don't want to be thanked by anybody for having nursed my own son. As for my not having written to you, I was under the impression that you had refused to hold any communication with us."

"Ordinary rules do not apply to extraordinary circumstances," observed Sir George. "However, we will let that pass. Perhaps you will allow me to see Willie for a few minutes. I will not remain with him longer than you may think advisable in his present state."

So moderate a request could scarcely be refused, though Marcia would fain have refused it. She said: "You can go in for five minutes, if you

like; but he ought not to talk much, and I hope you will be very careful to say nothing that could excite or distress him."

Glancing at his watch, Sir George gave the required promise. Whatever may have been his shortcomings, he always kept his word, and precisely upon the expiration of the time allowed him, he emerged from the sick-room and rejoined Marcia, who, by dint of a vigorous call upon her reserve powers of generosity and self-control, had waited for him outside. He was so kind as to express once more the sentiments of gratitude which had already offended her.

"From what Willie has told me, and from what I myself have seen," said he, "I am convinced that nothing more could have been done for him than has been done. He is now, I hope, well advanced on the road towards recovery, and I shall lose no time in telegraphing to his aunt, who, as you will understand, is very anxious. I may possibly call again to-morrow morning; but in any case I shall leave this by the afternoon express."

He then bowed ceremoniously and withdrew, leaving it to be inferred that, the circumstances having ceased to be extraordinary, he saw no reason for offering his hand a second time to a

lady with whom he did not wish to be upon speaking terms.

Marcia drew a long breath of relief when she heard the front door close behind him ; for she had been in mortal terror lest he should have come to insist upon Willie's removal to Blaydon, and she had prepared herself for a struggle whence she had hardly expected to issue victorious. But, as things had fallen out, it seemed that there was little danger of her maternal privileges being infringed. "After all," she reflected, rather shabbily, "I suppose neither he nor Caroline want to be burdened with an invalid. All they want is an heir, and I'm sure I don't grudge them that. On the contrary, I should be only too delighted if they would take themselves off and make room for him!"

Sir George, for his part, went away pretty well satisfied. He had honourably refrained from agitating his nephew; but he had thought it permissible to put certain questions with reference to Lady Evelyn, and the answers which he had received had been of a nature to render his own proper course of action quite clear to him. That, of itself, is always a source of legitimate satisfaction to the single-minded ; so that he returned to his hotel feeling far more at ease than he had been

on leaving it, and, after having dispatched a reassuring telegram to Lady Brett, dined and slept well.

Now, the course of action as to the propriety of which Sir George was so decided was one which many people might consider a trifle audacious; but not many people are blessed with the comprehensive knowledge of the world and its inhabitants which Sir George Brett possessed. It was therefore without any misgivings that he ordered a fly on the ensuing morning and had himself driven up to Malton Lodge; nor was he at all surprised when the private interview with Lady Wetherby which he demanded was accorded to him. "She knows well enough what has brought me here," he thought to himself complacently, as he sat down and awaited her ladyship's entrance.

As a matter of fact, Lady Wetherby had not the faintest idea of what the man wanted. She came in presently and said how glad she had been to hear favourable reports of Willie's condition; after which she looked politely interrogative. Sir George, who was before all things a man of business, came to the point at once.

"I do not wish to appear too abrupt, Lady Wetherby," he began; "but I have not much time at my disposal, and I must beg you to excuse

me if I don't beat about the bush. The long and the short of it is that this nephew of mine is desperately smitten with your daughter. I dare say that is no news to you. Well, then you will naturally ask what are his means and prospects, and I am ready to give you the fullest and most candid information."

Sir George accordingly went into figures of which the magnitude was sufficiently imposing and wound up by asking: "Now, what do you say, Lady Wetherby? Are you with me so far?"

Lady Wetherby looked, as she felt, a good deal perplexed. She had had no explanation with her daughter; she did not know whether Evelyn was conscious of having made that involuntary and incriminating ejaculation on board the yacht; she could not even tell for certain whether it had been overheard by Mr. Mortimer, who was still in Torquay, but whose attentions had undoubtedly become less marked since the day of the accident. Her impression, however, was that her pet scheme was doomed to failure: added to which, she desired nothing more ardently than her daughter's happiness—provided always that that result could be achieved by reasonable methods. Personally, she did not think that Willie Brett was quite well born enough to be her son-in-law; still, if he was the

man of Evelyn's choice and if he was to have all that money, she would not feel justified in turning her back upon him. To these conflicting sentiments she eventually gave utterance with much ingenuousness, admitting that she had noticed Willie's attachment to her daughter, but making no secret of the obstacles which she saw in the way of the proposed match.

"I am not at all sure that my son would approve of it," said she; "I cannot answer in any way for Evelyn herself, and, for my own part, I will tell you frankly that I have had other views——"

"Yes, yes; I know all about that," interrupted Sir George without ceremony; "but I am not going to admit that Willie is this Mr. Mortimer's inferior. In point of pedigree he may be below him; but that doesn't count for a great deal in these days, and after what I have told you, you will perceive that he will be a considerably more wealthy man—subject, that is, to conditions which I will specify presently. May I take it that, if my nephew cannot count upon your support, he can count at least upon your neutrality?"

That word seemed to describe Lady Wetherby's mental attitude correctly enough, and she signified her assent. "But I hope you understand," said she, "that the decision rests with my daughter,

not with me. I have always thought that she had a right to choose for herself and that I should have no right to thwart her, unless she chose a man of bad character or one whose means were insufficient."

"Exactly so," agreed Sir George approvingly—for in truth this was just what he had wanted Lady Wetherby to say. "Well, I don't think you will find a better or steadier young man in England than my nephew, and I have told you what his means will probably be. It now only remains for me to state my conditions, which I hope you will consider justifiable. Mrs. Archdale, I know, is an old friend of yours, so I will say nothing against her; but as regards her husband, I am entitled to say behind his back what I should not hesitate to say to his face: namely, that he is an idle spendthrift, and that I do not mean him to live in luxury upon his stepson for the rest of his days. He, or his wife—it doesn't much matter which—has already borrowed money of Willie, and if that sort of thing is not nipped in the bud it is sure to go on and increase. Consequently, I have told Willie—and what I have said I shall stick to—that any future loan made by him to his mother will entail the loss of every penny that he would otherwise inherit at my death, and I may add that it

would entail the forfeiture of the very handsome allowance that I propose to make to him upon his marriage."

"And did he agree to that?" inquired Lady Wetherby, a little taken back.

"I can't say that he did. He is not wanting in common sense; but he is young and does not know the value of money. Moreover, he is fond of his mother—having seen nothing of her since he was a child."

"I don't think we can fairly blame him for being fond of his mother," observed Lady Wetherby, laughing.

"It isn't a question of praise or blame; it is a question of whether he is to be allowed to make a fool of himself or not. It is also a question of whether he is to be allowed to make a fool of me, and to that I am ready with a decisive reply. I can devote my money to more useful purposes than the maintenance of the Archdale family."

"Well, but," objected Lady Wetherby, "if he won't make a promise which I really doubt whether I should make if I were in his place, what is to be done?"

"Simply this," answered Sir George: "he must be given to understand that unless he complies with my conditions, he may as well give up all hope

of ever winning Lady Evelyn. He will not throw his mother overboard to please me or to get my money: as I tell you, he is young and, in some respects, foolish. But throwing the girl whom he loves overboard will be quite another matter. I merely wish to be able to tell him upon your authority that you will not consent to your daughter's marriage with a pauper, and in telling him so I shall not exceed the limits of truth, I believe?"

"It is true that I do not think Evelyn would be happy as the wife of a poor man," answered Lady Wetherby slowly. "At the same time, I do not quite like threatening him with such a severe punishment for doing what I suppose we all feel that our children ought to do for us. I know very little about Marcia Archdale's circumstances; but they may be worse than I imagined. Suppose she were to fall into a state of absolute destitution?"

"My dear madam," answered Sir George, "her husband can support her perfectly well if he chooses to work; but he won't work unless he is driven to it. That is the long and the short of the whole matter. As for me, I am an old man; I cannot expect to live for more than another ten years, though I may reasonably expect to live as

long, and it is hardly possible for me to place restrictions upon the spending of my fortune after my death. But in ten years' time Willie will know a good deal more than he knows now. For the present I must be firm. I have put my terms before you: may I ask whether they meet with your approval?"

"I don't think I can say any more than I have said," Lady Wetherby replied, after a moment of consideration. "It is my duty to insist, so far as I can, upon adequate provision being made for my daughter; but any understanding that may be entered into between you and your nephew is your concern. I would rather not be mixed up in it."

"That is enough," Sir George declared. "I feel that my position is now very greatly strengthened, and I will not trespass any farther upon your time."

He added some formal words of thanks and withdrew, quite pleased with the diplomatic ability which he believed himself to have displayed. If the lever which he now held under his hand was not powerful enough to jerk that young man clean out of the rut of mistaken filial sentiment, why then the young man must be such a consummate fool that no sane person would dream of leaving him a fortune.

## CHAPTER X.

### MORTIMER TAKES LEAVE.

Sir George went straight off to demand a farewell interview with his nephew, which Marcia, who received him, willingly sanctioned. If all he wanted was to say good-bye, he might do that, and welcome. She would doubtless have shown herself less amenable had she divined the true nature of his errand; but, little though she liked her brother-in-law, she did not give him credit for such malignant ingenuity as was implied in his present system of tactics, and of course it was none of his business to enlighten her. But with Willie Sir George was quite straightforward and plain-spoken.

"Now, my boy," said he briskly, as he seated himself by the bedside, with a hand on each knee, "I've brought you a piece of good news which will do more for you than all the doctor's tonics, I hope. I've just been having a little talk with Lady Wetherby about your love-affairs, and I'm glad to

tell you that she agrees with me in thinking you a very eligible suitor for her daughter's hand."

Willie's large eyes, which looked unnaturally large now that his face had become so pale and thin, grew larger still, and a sudden light leapt into them. "Did she really say that?" he asked breathlessly.

"Why in the world shouldn't she, you silly fellow? I told her what your prospects were, I told her what I was prepared to do for you on your marriage, and, like a sensible woman as she is, she admitted that you are not the sort of fish that one lands and then throws back into the water. In point of fact, she took precisely the view which I was sure that she would take. Upon the understanding that you are to be my heir you may pay your addresses to Lady Evelyn; but not otherwise. I explained to her that you would certainly be my heir, subject to the one condition that you know of. Under the circumstances, I hope and believe that you will see the absolute necessity of complying with that condition; but I don't wish to argue about it. I prefer to leave the matter in your hands, only assuring you that neither Lady Wetherby nor I can alter our decision."

Willie, for his part, had no inclination to argue. His brain still worked feebly, and just now it was

fully occupied with the amazing fact that Lady Wetherby had consented upon any terms to hear of him as a wooer.

"I can't understand it," he said, after a pause. "Has Lady Evelyn refused Mortimer, then? Did you see her?"

"Oh no," answered Sir George, laughing; "I can deal with old ladies, but you must undertake the young ones. I didn't inquire whether Mr. Mortimer had been refused or not; but it is evident that he hasn't been accepted, so you may draw your own conclusions from that. I should say that you had nothing to do but to get well as quickly as you can and then go in and win. Don't you fall into the mistake of undervaluing yourself, young man; Lady Evelyn won't do badly when she marries you, you may depend upon it."

Willie had very little to say in reply to this encouraging assurance, nor did he pay much heed to his uncle's final exhortation, which, when summed up, amounted only to a solemn warning against the folly of quarrelling with one's bread and butter.

"Understand me," Sir George concluded; "I do not ask you to do anything shabby or mean. Such an accident and illness as you have had must necessarily entail considerable expense, and

it would not be fair that this should fall upon Mrs. Archdale. Indeed, I should be very sorry to think that you or I were in any way indebted to her. I have therefore written a cheque in your favour for £200, which ought to be sufficient to pay the doctor and compensate her for any outlay that she may have incurred. If it is not, you can let me know. What I will not permit is that her husband should look upon you as a possible source of income; and the sooner you make that clear to him the better."

After Sir George had taken his departure Willie had leisure to think matters over; (for Marcia had been waylaid by her husband, who wanted to know how long this preposterous manner of life was likely to last, and had to be pacified at some expenditure of time and patience.) Well, amid so much that was uncertain, there stood out one great and indisputable fact: Lady Wetherby was no longer opposed to his candidature. To what this unexpected change of front might be due, Willie could not conjecture—possibly to Mortimer's rejection, possibly to the golden promises held out by his uncle. But, whatever might be its cause, its importance, taken in conjunction with the equally important fact that during all this time Lady Evelyn had not plighted her troth elsewhere,

could hardly be overrated. And then, as was but natural, he began to ask himself whether the stipulation imposed upon him was of so unjust a nature that he could not submit to it. He remembered Drake's warning; he himself doubted the abstract wisdom of supplying his lazy stepfather with funds; moreover, his own resources would not enable him to do this, except to a very limited extent, while his uncle's would not, of course, be available for such a purpose. Upon the whole, it seemed as if he might very fairly represent that he was fettered by the unalterable decision of others.

However, he said nothing about all this to his mother, who, when she came into the room, was too full of her personal grievances to ask questions.

From that day forward Willie's convalescence proceeded rapidly. He was very eager to get well, very eager for news of his friends at Malton Lodge, and all the more so after he heard from his mother that Lady Wetherby had at last been to call. It did not appear that Lady Wetherby had said anything worthy of record in the course of her visit, and she had not been accompanied by her daughter; still, the mere circumstance that she had walked up to the house was not without significance, and Willie made so bold as to request that when she next came he might be allowed to see her. For

that privilege he waited in vain; but, one mild, sunny morning, when he was lying on his sofa beside the window, which despite the advanced season of the year, had been thrown open for his benefit, a visitor was announced whom he was almost, if not quite, as glad to see.

"Well, old man," said Mr. Mortimer, shaking him heartily by the hand, "you've had a rough time of it, haven't you? But you're pretty well all right again now, eh?"

"I shall be soon, they tell me," answered Willie; "but I can't walk yet and I am as weak as a cat. Still I believe I'm round the corner. Sit down and tell me the news. What have you been doing with yourself all this long time?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Mortimer. "Playing golf—loafing about—one thing and another. I should have hooked it long ago, only I didn't like to go till I was sure you were out of danger; you see, I feel that I'm in a sort of way responsible for your misfortune, though goodness knows I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for a thousand pounds. However, I think I can safely take my ticket now; and in point of fact I've come to say good-bye. I'm off to-morrow morning to do a few weeks of shooting. I hear first-rate accounts from my keeper, I'm glad to say; so I

hope to get some fellows down and have a good time."

It was noticeable that his manner was somewhat unnaturally jovial and that, after the first moment, he showed a disinclination to look his friend in the face. The latter felt that it was quite out of his power to keep up a conversation upon indifferent topics; so, at the risk of giving offence, he asked presently—

"How have things gone with you, Mortimer?"

"Oh, middling well, thank you," replied the other; "I haven't much to complain of, except an overdose of Torquay. I doubt whether I shall ever revisit this enchanting spot."

"You know what I mean," persisted Willie; "you can't have forgotten what you said to me the day before we went out in the yacht. Has she refused you?"

"Hasn't had the chance, my dear boy. When one is perfectly certain of being refused, one takes the liberty of sparing one's self an unpleasant five minutes. I freely admit that I've been as blind as a bat and as stupid as an owl; but more by good luck than good guidance, I did discover just in time that I might about as well propose to the Empress of China as to Lady Evelyn. I suppose you knew that all along. Or didn't you know?"

Willie shook his head. "How could I know?"

he asked. "I thought she would most likely accept you; only, to tell the truth, I didn't think she was exactly in love with you."

"H'm! that isn't over and above complimentary to her; but you can make her an apology if you like, because, you see, you did her an injustice."

"I suppose I did," said Willie meditatively; "but, as she doesn't know that I was unjust and probably wouldn't care if she did know, I don't think I'll risk the impertinence of an apology. From what she said I gathered that she liked you without being in love with you, and that she considered that sufficient for all intents and purposes. Personally, I can't believe that mere liking is sufficient; and that's why I won't pretend to be sorry for you, Mortimer."

"Have I asked you to be sorry for me?" Mortimer inquired. "I should have been very sorry for myself if she had accepted me only because I am more or less a matrimonial prize; but I am glad to say that I don't believe she ever contemplated anything of the sort. You apparently do."

Willie could not deny that he had so believed. In his own mind he had made many excuses for the girl whom he loved; but he did not feel much inclined to state these by way of excusing himself,

and it looked as though a conversation which at the outset had promised to be interesting would not leave him much wiser with regard to Lady Evelyn than he had been before. But Mortimer, after sitting silent for a few moments, startled him by resuming suddenly—

"I say, Brett, I want you to tell me something. You needn't unless you choose; only I took you into my confidence, you know, so it isn't an unpardonable piece of presumption to ask for yours. Are you yourself in love with Lady Evelyn?"

Nobody altogether enjoys answering a question of that kind; but Willie could not help feeling that his questioner was entitled to an honest reply, and this he accordingly gave, getting rather red in the face over it and stammering a good deal. "But I hope you understand," he added, "that I never meant to deceive you. I would have told you the truth before; only I didn't see what possible difference it would make to you. And indeed I don't see now."

"That's all right, old chap," said Mortimer, holding out his hand with good-humoured magnanimity. "I only wanted to know; I didn't suspect you of having been anything but perfectly straight with me. As you say, your telling me wouldn't have made a bit of difference. I should have proposed

all the same, because, to be quite frank, I shouldn't have thought much of your chances. I think a good deal of them now; I think you will get what you want, and—and I'm sincerely glad of it. What's the use of being a dog in the manger? Being out of the hunt one's self isn't a reason for grudging another man his luck, especially when he's a good fellow, as you are."

This was really handsome behaviour, and so Willie thought. He tried, so far as Anglo-Saxon reticence would allow him, to express his appreciation of it, and he also tried, as all of us probably would have done in his place, to find out what reason his friend had for speaking with such confidence. These latter efforts, however, met with no success. Mortimer would only say that he had taken note of certain trifling incidents and had drawn his own deductions therefrom. He was not prepared to reveal, nor in truth could he honourably have revealed, a secret which had been involuntarily betrayed in his presence.

Nevertheless, he was extremely friendly and encouraging; so much so that after a time Willie, taking heart of grace, confided to him the dilemma in which he found himself, owing to the restrictions placed upon him by his uncle, and asked for his advice.

"You see," said he, "it just comes to this: even supposing that you are right and that Lady Evelyn would take me if I asked her, I can't possibly ask her without binding myself down never to lend another sixpence to my mother. I've tried to see my way to making that promise, but the more I think of it the less I like it. It would be too abominably selfish and ungrateful. Now, don't you think it would?"

"Oh, you couldn't do it if your mother were in a condition of penury," Mortimer agreed; "but I should think she was a very long way removed from that. Why, her husband's pictures are worth any amount of money, aren't they?"

"I believe he gets fair prices; but he doesn't seem to paint much, and, as far as I can make out, he spends all that he gets. Of course, if you live beyond your income you must be in trouble, whether your income is large or small."

"Ah, well, that alters the case. You aren't bound to help Mr. Archdale to live beyond his income, and you certainly aren't bound to ruin yourself in the attempt. It looks to me as if your uncle had pretty well settled the question for you. He says, 'If you won't give me your word not to spend my money in a certain way, you shan't have the money at all.' Well, there you are. If Mrs.

Archdale is a rational human being, she'll understand that you would be delighted to accommodate her if you could. but that you can't. Besides, Lady Evelyn has some claim to be considered. I suppose you care more for her than you do for your mother, don't you? At all events, you ought."

Willie nodded assent, though he did not feel entirely satisfied. The advice given to him was just what he, or anybody else, would have given under the circumstances; yet he shrank from acting upon it. To be sure, there was no need for him to take immediate action. The first thing to be done was to ascertain whether he really had any prospect of succeeding with Lady Evelyn, and this Mortimer urged him to do without delay.

"The sooner you are put into a fly or a bath-chair or something and trundled over to Malton Lodge the better," was the opinion of that sage and generous counsellor; "it won't do for you to lie here, fretting yourself to fiddle-strings. Not that there's anything to fret about, because it will be all right, you'll find. Well, good-bye, Brett; we shall meet again one of these days, I hope, but I don't mean to turn up at your wedding. There are some things that one would a little rather hear about than see, you know."

## CHAPTER XI.

### WILLIE BREAKS BOUNDS.

Mortimer, on going downstairs, thought it would be only civil to say good-bye to Mrs. Archdale, who seemed to be somewhat surprised at the news of his impending departure. She said she supposed he would be back again soon, and when he replied that he had no intention of returning, she raised her eyebrows and considerately abstained from putting further questions. There was, however, no reason why she should not question her son, and this she took an early opportunity of doing.

"What does this sudden flight mean?" she asked point-blank. "Is he running away because he has thought better of it, or has the girl really rejected him? I don't believe she would do that —she is too fully alive to her own interests; because, although Mr. Mortimer doesn't happen to have a title, he is better off than a good many peers, and she is no such great beauty that she can afford to throw away her chances."

But Willie steadily refused to be drawn. Ignorant though he was of the first principles of the art of dissimulation, he at least knew how to hold his tongue, and that useful capability he now exercised; so that his mother could get no more out of him than an admission that Mortimer had told him something.

"But I don't think I ought to repeat what he told me," the young man added ingenuously, "so I'd rather you didn't ask me, please."

He had very sensibly resolved to keep his own counsel for the present. Mortimer, after all, could not possibly know what he professed to be so certain of, nor was it worth while to raise a discussion about circumstances which might never occur. The main thing was to get up sufficient strength for an expedition as far as Malton Lodge; and, aided by this spur to recovery, as well as by the unusual mildness of the autumn weather, he was able in the course of a few days to obtain permission from the doctor to take a short drive in a pony-chair. The next step was to suggest, in an innocent sort of way, an object for that drive, and, as he had anticipated, his suggestion was not immediately accepted by his mother.

"Why should you want to go there?" she inquired suspiciously. "It will tire you very much

to walk in and out of the house, and I really don't see what right they have to expect that your first visit should be paid to them. They haven't taken any very great trouble about you all this time, I'm sure. Oh, I know they have sent a servant to ask how you were getting on—they could hardly do less. Laura has only once been to see me, though."

But as Willie averred that he had a fancy for calling upon Lady Wetherby, and as an invalid's fancies must be humoured, she ended by yielding a grudging assent. Perhaps she may have reflected that her presence must necessarily lend a formal and colourless character to the forthcoming interview—a fact of which Willie also was regretfully aware. Still, he could not as yet propose to dispense with his mother's escort, and half a loaf is better than no bread.

Half a loaf, indeed, was all that was vouchsafed to him upon that occasion; for, although both Lady Wetherby and her daughter were at home, and although he was welcomed with no little warmth and kindliness, not a single chance was given him of exchanging anything but the most commonplace remarks with the younger lady. Lady Evelyn was not in the drawing-room when he and his mother were announced; but she entered presently, and whether she was or was not

conscious that three pairs of eyes were fixed upon her eagerly and questioningly, she behaved herself in such a manner as to completely baffle their unspoken queries. She was, to all appearance, quite calm and self-possessed; she bestowed a smile and a hearty shake of the hand upon Willie, congratulating him on his restoration to health; after which she sat down beside him and began to talk about the weather, which was certainly warm enough to merit remark.

"Now, it is evident that, unless she had been an absolute idiot, she would not have acted in any other way, whatever her secret sentiments might have been; but that did not prevent her mother and Marcia from being puzzled nor Willie from being a little chilled. Not until the moment of his departure did she see fit to raise his spirits in some degree by remarking—

"The next time that you pay us a visit, which will be very soon, I hope, you must try to accomplish the journey on foot. It is really no distance, if you come in by the garden-gate."

"He is quite unfit to walk alone," broke in Marcia, with some asperity, before Willie could make any reply; "nothing would induce me to let him attempt such an impossibility!"

"Oh, it won't be an impossibility much longer,"

returned Lady Evelyn sweetly. "Besides, there is no need for him to attempt it alone. You can come with him, you know, so as to be prepared to run and catch him if he falls."

Marcia not only thought this an impertinent speech, but was convinced that it was intentionally so—as, to tell the truth, it may have been. As she walked away beside her son's pony-chair she descanted, not for the first time, upon the atrocious manners of "that girl," declaring that she could hardly find it in her heart to pity her for having been jilted by Mr. Mortimer, though of course such experiences must be very mortifying.

"A girl may turn a man's head for a time by throwing herself at it," she remarked, "and she may make him angry or miserable by getting up flirtations with other people; but unless he is a very foolish man indeed, tactics of that kind will never persuade him to marry her."

Possibly that may be so; but what is a good deal more certain is that no man was ever restrained from marrying by the system of tactics which had apparently recommended itself to Marcia. Nor, for the matter of that, would any conceivable system of tactics have restrained Willie from walking up to Malton Lodge the very first moment that he could trust his legs to carry

him thither. Two days later he successfully performed the feat, having, in a most unworthy manner, given his mother the slip in order to do it. It was, no doubt, very wrong of him to pretend that he was only going to take a turn round the garden while she occupied herself for half an hour with the household affairs which she had neglected for so long; still, moralists have always held that, if ever deception is justifiable, it is so in the case of a prisoner who is trying to escape, and without some recourse to duplicity Willie did not see what hope there could be of his securing Lady Evelyn's private ear for a minute or two.

He thought himself very lucky when he approached the lower entrance to Malton Lodge and descried Lady Evelyn pacing up and down the gravel walk which adjoined it, and sunning herself in such warmth as is obtainable on a fine November day in these latitudes; but perhaps if he had been a little more sharp and a little less modest, he might have drawn obvious deductions from the circumstance that Lady Wetherby's garden-gate opened only from the inside. Whether he was expected or not, his arrival called forth no expressions of surprise from the young lady who admitted him, and who remarked laughingly—

"You have broken loose, then? I thought you would."

With a somewhat guilty air, Willie avowed that he had broken bounds. His mother, he explained, did not realize how much stronger he was growing every day, and as he was now quite fit to take care of himself, he had thought it best to avoid needless discussions by the logic of an accomplished fact. He ventured furthermore to remark that one couldn't talk very comfortably when one knew that somebody was listening to every word one said.

Lady Evelyn fully concurred.

"It was only the presence of our respective mothers that kept me from asking you a hundred questions the other day," she observed.

"I shall be delighted to give you a hundred answers now," returned Willie promptly.

She did not really wish for quite so large a number as that; in point of fact, there was but one point which she was specially desirous to have cleared up. This, however, could not be brought forward in a direct fashion, so that it had to be led up to by degrees, and was only reached after Willie had taken an amount of walking exercise of which his mother certainly would not have approved. He was made to give

a detailed description of his illness and to state what recollection he had of the accident which had befallen him—whence it appeared that he knew next to nothing about that.

"The last thing that I can remember," said he, "is being told that Lady Wetherby was sea-sick and that we should have to put back. What happened after that I have no idea."

"But of course Mr. Mortimer must have told you," observed Lady Evelyn; "I know he went to say good-bye to you and stayed ever so long."

"Yes, but we didn't talk much about the accident; all I know I heard from my mother, who could only give me a vague account."

"You didn't talk about the accident! How extraordinary of you! I suppose he said something about it, though—how frightened we were, and—and—so forth? We all thought you were dead, you know."

But Willie replied that he had neither asked for nor received any particulars. His face, of which Lady Evelyn could obtain a sufficient view out of the corner of her eye, showed that he was speaking the truth, and, since he did not wish to be cross-examined as to that conversation of his with Mortimer, he was not sorry when she abruptly dropped the subject. What he was

rather sorry for was that she manifested no inclination to introduce a fresh one. She discovered all of a sudden that the air was cold, notwithstanding the sunshine, and that he ought not to be allowed to stand about any longer.

"Come indoors and see mamma," said she. "Then you can rest a little, and if you don't feel equal to the walk back, we'll send for the pony-chair."

Of course he had to obey orders. If he had had no reason so far to be dissatisfied with his reception, it assuredly had not been of a nature to confirm the assurances of Mortimer, about whom Lady Evelyn took occasion, during the short walk to the house, to speak in terms of high commendation. He was a thorough gentleman, Willie was told, and a most kind-hearted and unselfish fellow into the bargain: anybody might be proud to have such a friend. She added that she had missed him greatly since his departure, and would have regretted that event still more if she had not known that the poor man was wearied to death of Torquay.

"He was as good as gold and never complained," she said; "but, for all his politeness, he couldn't quite conceal his delight when he was told that you were out of danger and that he might go away and shoot."

Lady Wetherby greeted her visitor kindly. She had made up her mind to what seemed to be inevitable and was not discontented upon the whole; after all, things might have been very much worse. Only she hoped that the young people would soon come to an understanding; because suspense is always disagreeable, and she foresaw that she would have to take their side against her son and the rest of the family. Spectators are apt to be impatient under such circumstances, forgetting that what is obvious to them is not likely to be by any means as obvious to the persons more directly concerned.

As for Willie, he contemplated nothing so audacious as an immediate avowal of his love. He went away neither elated nor depressed, yet feeling that, all things considered, he had a right to congratulate himself; for, if he had gained nothing else, he had gained an explicit invitation to walk up to Malton Lodge as often as he might be inclined to do so. That, he thought, would be every day.

Meanwhile, Marcia, who had been adding up her accounts, and had found the process as dispiriting as such processes usually are, was in no mood to make light of his escapade.

"Oh, it is quite unnecessary for you to tell me

where you have been," said she, interrupting the timid avowal upon which he embarked; "of course I guessed at once what had become of you. Why you didn't tell me honestly where you were going, instead of sneaking off as if you were ashamed of yourself, I can't imagine. Naturally, you are tired of seeing nobody but me; I quite expected that it would come to that; besides, you are well enough to do without me now."

It was no easy task to pacify her, and Willie had to give evidence of unaffected contrition, as well as to protest the sincerity of his affection for her again and again, before she would admit that she might perhaps have wronged him by her suspicions.

"I suppose the truth is that I am getting old and ill-tempered," she sighed tearfully at length. "Well, I have enough to make me so, I'm sure! I wonder why it is that bills are always and invariably so much higher than one expects them to be!"

"Bills are sure to be high when one has a troublesome invalid to provide for," said Willie; and he thought this a good opportunity to mention that his uncle had handed him a couple of hundred pounds in payment of the expenses which she had incurred on his behalf.

Marcia began by indignantly refusing to touch

Sir George's money, but accepted it when Willie pointed out that the money had been offered not to her, but to him. The distinction, perhaps, did not imply any great difference, and the sum was certainly in excess of her disbursements; but she was beginning to discover that pride is a luxury which goes ill with poverty. Moreover, she did not want to be proud with Willie, for whose sake she would gladly have spent any amount of money, if she had had it to spend. Nevertheless, she felt rather ashamed of herself as she pocketed the cheque which her son wrote out for her, and she registered an inward vow that there should be no further pecuniary transactions between them. Cecil, who had been grumbling about expense, would not be able to grumble any more after this. Nor would it be necessary to apologize for retaining Willie as a visitor until the expiration of his leave.

She said something to that effect, and it must be confessed that Willie was immensely relieved to hear her say it. He had been wanting to tell her, yet had felt that he never could be brutal enough to tell her, what were the conditions upon which he might hope to be nominated as his uncle's heir. He would have liked, had it seemed in any way possible, to mention them even now. But surely this declaration of hers absolved him from the per-

formance of so unpalatable a task. If she really did not mean to beg or borrow of him again, it would be insulting as well as needless to inform her that she could not do so without bringing upon him a calamity much heavier than the loss of an estate and a large income. So he held his peace, and friendly relations were re-established, and Marcia, being freed from immediate anxiety, managed to shut her eyes to the patent fact that there was somebody in Torquay whom her son loved better than he loved her.

For some days after this, peace and contentment reigned in the house of Archdale. Marcia had always been tolerably clever at declining to see what she did not wish to see; the weather continuing mild, she took her son out for drives in the afternoon in a hired victoria (for which he paid), and it pleased her to abstain from inquiring how and where his mornings were spent. Every day, after breakfast, he strolled up to Malton Lodge; every day Lady Evelyn, who happened to be inspecting the chrysanthemums, admitted him through the garden-gate, and every day he had a short walk and talk with her. No reader could peruse with patience an account of what passed during these interviews. Such readers as have ever been in love (which is much the same thing

as saying all readers) will readily understand that the subjects discussed during them were neither interesting in themselves nor treated after a fashion to interest outsiders; yet they will understand not less readily that, after two or three perfectly commonplace conversations, Willie's heart began to beat high with hope. Indeed, he had almost made up his mind that the time had come for him to speak out boldly, when an incident occurred which materially altered his views of the whole situation.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MATERNAL AND FILIAL LOVE.

It is safe to say of the majority of mankind that the course of their lives has been or will be directed chiefly by love or by money. The former influence is, of course, likely to be more potent in youth, while the latter comes into play with middle age; and Cecil Archdale was no exception to the common rule. He had been very frequently in love, and still possessed great capabilities in that direction; but owing to a marked falling off in the number of the ladies who showed a disposition to respond to his advances, he had of late been forced to turn his attention and ambition elsewhere, and, in an evil hour for himself, had taken to financing after an amateurish fashion. He really did not see what else there was for him to do. Painting pictures was all very well; but he could not paint enough of them to bring in the annual sum which he had learnt to consider as indispensable to his wants, and although he was profoundly ignorant of all

matters connected with the money-market, he would not allow so poor a reason to deter him from speculating. He had met plenty of men quite as ignorant as himself who had realized large amounts by buying and selling at the right moment under the advice of an experienced broker.

The game, however, like other games, is one at which there must be losers as well as winners, and it was Mr. Archdale's misfortune to be numbered in the former class. He did not, it is true, always lose, but he lost more often than he won; so that, little by little, his wife's fortune diminished, and more than once he had to let a really fine chance escape him through a modest reluctance to ask for more funds. Marcia was sometimes apt to be disagreeable about it, and when you have to spend your life with a woman, you should not, if you can possibly avoid doing so, get her into the habit of being disagreeable. He had, therefore, on finding himself unpleasantly pinched, resolved to apply to Drake—a man whom, as we know, he had repeatedly obliged in his more prosperous days, and a sad disappointment it had been to him to discover what a narrow construction Drake placed upon the claims of old acquaintance. He would have been still more grieved had he known that Drake, not content with refusing a reasonable request, had

officiously gone out of his way to warn others against acceding to it; but, since he was unaware of that treacherous act, he had fully determined to adopt the course which Drake had foreseen, and had only been prevented from so doing by his step-son's unlucky accident.

This accident was all the more unlucky because the delay which it had entailed had given Mr. Archdale time to involve himself in fresh difficulties. The original amount that he had required had been quite trifling—a mere matter of a few hundreds—but his laudable desire to clear himself and make a fresh start had led him into speculations which had turned out most unfortunately; so that he now found himself in urgent need of no less a sum than four thousand pounds odd. Now he felt a certain delicacy about asking young Brett to lend him so much as that. Doubtless young Brett could do it without serious inconvenience, because he had his uncle at his back and his personal tastes were evidently not of an expensive kind; still he might, and very likely he would, reply that he was under no obligation to pay his step-father's debts. On the other hand, he was under unquestionable obligations to his mother, and the appeal would perhaps come more fittingly and more convincingly from her. In short, after

carefully and impartially considering the matter, Mr. Archdale concluded that it would be a little less disagreeable to face the reproaches of Marcia than the coldness and possible rudeness of her son. One morning, therefore, he summoned up his courage, fortified it with a strong dose of whisky and soda, and sent a message upstairs to the effect that if Mrs. Archdale was disengaged he would be glad to speak to her for a minute or two.

In obedience to this summons Marcia presently appeared, with a countenance indicative of apprehension. She had learnt by painful experience that when her husband expressed a wish to speak to her, there was one subject, and only one, about which he wished to speak, and she had latterly been looking into the state of their joint affairs, with a result which had considerably alarmed her.

"I do hope you haven't been getting into trouble again, Cecil," she began.

Archdale shrugged his shoulders, flicked the ash off his cigarette and replied, "I am sorry to tell you, my dear, that I have. According to the theory of averages, I ought most certainly to have hit upon a vein of luck this time; but the theory of averages, like other theories, has a disgusting trick of breaking down, and I am now rather more than four thousand to the bad. The worst of it is,

too, that I shall have to settle in a few days or take the consequences—which, I presume, would be unpleasant."

"Four thousand pounds!" ejaculated Marcia in consternation; "how can you have been so insane? Do you know that, if we sell out another four thousand pounds, we shall be reduced almost to beggary?"

"You don't say so! Well, then, we mustn't sell out, that's all; we must raise the money in some other way. In point of fact, that was what I sent for you to suggest. One would always prefer not to borrow of friends or relations; but necessity has no law, and I think that if you were to ask this small favour of our interesting young invalid upstairs, he would hardly have the heart to refuse you. You can tell him that I will gladly pay him five per cent. upon his principal, which, I should imagine, is the outside of what he is getting for it now."

"I can't do that, Cecil," answered Marcia firmly. "I have already borrowed money of Willie, and, as you know, he has paid me £200 for his board and lodging—a great deal more than he ought to have paid. If you wish him to lend you £4000 you must ask for it yourself; I won't."

"Now, my dear Marcia," remonstrated Archdale,

"let me ask you as a reasonable being: is it likely that he will put himself to any inconvenience to get me out of a fix? He doesn't like me, and never has liked me. I am sorry for it, but the fact is indisputable; he will probably rather enjoy humiliating me by a refusal; and then—well, then, I am afraid, it will just end in your having to do what you now say you won't do—because we can't live upon air, you see."

"We could live upon a great deal less than we do live upon," returned Marcia; "and surely, Cecil, you might make a great deal more than you do make. I only wish I had your powers! If I had, I wouldn't disgrace myself by robbing my son, I know! But you don't seem to think that there is anything shameful in all this."

"My dear," answered Archdale forbearingly, "you are mistaken there. I am conscious of a distinct sense of shame, and if I don't thrust it forward that is only because I doubt whether there is anything virtuous in it. I shouldn't have felt ashamed if I had made £4000, you see, and it looked as though the chances were all in favour of my doing so."

"I don't mean that," said Marcia. "At the worst, it is only silly and imprudent to speculate and live beyond one's income; but it seems to

me disgraceful to ask for a loan which you will never be able to repay, and which of course won't be refused."

"Oh, excuse me; I quite hope to repay it, and in the mean time, as I tell you, the interest shall be forthcoming punctually. I am going to turn over a new leaf, Marcia; I am going to work hard and earn a comfortable competence, if not a fortune. I fully admit that I have been indolent—never in my life have I denied that mime is an indolent temperament—but I don't mean to be indolent any longer. I shall at once begin to paint pot-boilers; I trust that you will not call that disgraceful, considering the extremities to which we are reduced. But £4000 is really necessary for the present distress, and I can't make £4000 straight off the reel."

Marcia did not give way at once; she had resolved that she would be no further beholden to her son, and she fully intended to abide by her resolution. But in the long run she allowed herself to be talked over. Even supposing that Willie never saw his £4000 again he would scarcely miss the money, whereas the immediate payment of so large a sum would place her and her husband in most uncomfortable straits; since one or other of two evils was unavoidable, what could she do

but choose the less? She accordingly administered a severe rebuke to Cecil, who submitted to it with angelic patience, and warned him that this was the very last time she would stoop to solicit alms on his account. She said she hoped that his recent fiasco would serve him as a lesson; to which he replied that it certainly would. He had had more than enough of meddling with matters which he did not understand; for the future he proposed to make money in a more sensible and legitimate way by sticking to those which he did.

And when, later in the day, Marcia found an opportunity of admitting Willie into her confidence, she dwelt a good deal upon the circumstance that this promise had been given. Cecil, she said, had been foolish and reckless, no doubt—that could not be denied, nor did he himself deny it. But he had been terribly scared by the consequences of his folly, and she was sure that these would produce a permanent as well as a salutary effect upon him. "I believe he is sincere in saying that he means to set to work in earnest now, and although it may be some little time before he can repay you the principal, I really don't think that you need feel at all anxious about the interest."

Willie, whose face had grown rather long while his mother had been speaking, made a quick

gesture with his hand and began to walk to and fro between the fireplace and the window.

"It isn't that," he answered presently. "My own conviction is that Mr. Archdale is past the age for making fresh starts and that he will never work hard now; but that is neither here nor there. I don't want to help him, and I don't see why I should; but I do want, and I do think I am bound, to help you as far as I can, mother. All the same——"

"Oh, I know!" interrupted Marcia. "I perfectly understand how you feel about it: you and he have never been friends, and it would be outrageous to ask you to make any sacrifice for his sake. It is only for my own sake that I ask it, and I can't tell you how hateful it is to me to make such a request. Yet I must make it—I have no alternative. Our account at the bank is already very much overdrawn; our income is so uncertain that I can't cut my coat according to my cloth; all I can tell you is that it has been growing steadily less every year, and that it isn't anything like sufficient to meet our present expenditure. It seems to me that if I have to sell out another £4000 we shall be to all intents and purposes ruined."

Willie hesitated, as well he might. He could not

live in the enjoyment of luxury and leave his mother in want; yet it was, to say the least of it, doubtful whether £4000 would do more than retard the ruin of which she spoke, while the handing over to her of that sum would bring something worse than pecuniary ruin upon himself. Upon the whole, he thought he had a right to tell her how he was circumstanced, so he resumed—

"What I was going to say was this. Some time ago, when you had a small loan from me, to which I am sure you were most heartily welcome, Uncle George got into a rage about it, and——"

"Do you mean to say that you told him?" interrupted Marcia. "Oh, Willie, I should never have believed that you would have done that!"

"I didn't tell him; but I bank with him, and he saw the cheque. He gave me to understand then, and he has repeated it a good deal more emphatically since, that he wouldn't sanction my lending you money. He said that, if such a thing occurred again, he would disinherit me. I am not standing up for him; I think he is very hard upon you and rather hard upon me. Still he is entitled to do what he pleases with his own, and it is only right that I should let you know what will happen if I disobey him."

It was not a pleasant statement to be compelled

to make, and Willie was painfully conscious of having made it in a cold, unfeeling way; but the effect of it upon his mother was not in the least what he had anticipated.

"Oh, that is rubbish!" she returned, laughing. "George has a spite against me, and he would like, if he could, to frighten you out of ever having anything more to do with us; but as for carrying out his threat, you may be sure that he will do no such thing. It might be different if there were any one except you whom he could possibly make his heir; but there isn't a soul. Do you imagine that George is the man to bequeath all he possesses to a hospital? My dear Willie, he is just about as likely to do that as—as I am to be taken in by such a cock-and-bull story."

"I think he was in earnest," said Willie.

"I'm sure you do, my dear; but I know that he couldn't have been. The worst that he will ever do to you will be to scold you."

What rejoinder could be made to that? Willie was reluctant to reveal everything, yet he felt that it was not only his right, but his duty to do so. Somewhat incoherently, but not without a touch of pathos which one who loved him as Marcia did ought to have perceived and appreciated, he avowed his love for Evelyn Foljambe, and men-

tioned the proviso under which alone he could venture to make that avowal in another quarter. He had, as it chanced, returned home from Malton Lodge that day in excellent spirits; it had seemed to him that he had a reasonable prospect of success, and he had resolved that he would find out on the following morning whether he was mistaken or not. His mother's unexpected demand had, therefore, come upon him in some sort like a death-warrant.

"So now you see how it is," he concluded, sighing (for he was a little disheartened by the scornful smile into which Marcia's lips had curved themselves during his recital). "As my uncle's heir there is just a possibility that I may be accepted; but as a subaltern with a few hundreds a year I mustn't even dare to ask."

"I see it as plainly as I see you," his mother replied. "Laura Wetherby would think she was flying in the face of Providence if she were to drive away a man so rich as you will be, and her daughter, no doubt, is of the same mind. George, who desires nothing in the world so much as to bring me to the workhouse, has come to an understanding with them, and is probably rubbing his hands now with glee at the recollection of how clever he has been. Well, if you care to win a

wife on those terms, there is nothing more to be said."

"I don't blame Lady Wetherby in the least," Willie declared; "she is bound to warn off suitors who have only a small income; that isn't greed, it is merely ordinary prudence. If I can't ask Lady Evelyn to marry me, it will be my own doing, not hers."

"Which is as much as to say that it will be mine," observed Marcia. "Truly and honestly I don't shrink from the responsibility. I don't expect you to believe me; nevertheless, I am convinced that if I can cure you of your infatuation for that girl I shall do you a service for which you will thank me some day. My poor boy, the world is full of pretty girls! More than half of them are prettier than she is, and nine out of ten of them have better dispositions. Very likely she will take you, just as she would have taken Mr. Mortimer if he had given her the chance; but don't delude yourself into the belief that she will ever be in love with you, or with anybody else."

"You may be right, mother," answered Willie, patiently; "but I am sure you cannot persuade me that you are right. All I wanted to make clear to you is that, though I can give you £4000, and would most gladly give you more than that,

if it were only a question of the loss of the money, I can't do it without—without——"

"Without abandoning some one whom you care for a great deal more than you care for me. Very well, then; so be it. In a sort of way, I suppose, you are fond of me; but you are still fonder of her—there is the whole story in a nutshell. I don't think I should mind so much if she were in the least bit worthy of you; but what is the use of saying any more? You are a man now, and you are not different from other men—why should you be?"

But the unfortunate thing was that this soft-hearted fellow did differ in some important respects from the general run of mankind. When his mother covered her face with her hands and began to sob he was practically undone. Doubtless he was a fool, yet the world would be all the better off if it contained a few more such fools. It was not necessary for Marcia to plead, as she presently did, that she was the most unhappy of women, and that the difficulties in which she was involved were not of her creating; still less was it necessary for her to protest that nothing would induce her to save herself from ruin at her son's expense if by so doing she were really placing his pecuniary prospects in jeopardy. It was not

of his pecuniary prospects that Willie was thinking, nor was she concerned to promote the object upon which he had set his heart.

So at the end of a quarter of an hour she was drying her eyes and embracing her dear boy, who, as she was good enough to say, had given her a convincing proof that he loved her. And she was sure that he would never repent of what he had done. There was not the slightest danger that Sir George would cast him adrift; while as for Lady Evelyn, she would soon marry somebody else, and very soon lose such looks as she now possessed. "Mark my words, Willie; two years hence you will laugh at the idea that you once lost your heart to her."

But Willie could not respond, and got out of the room as quickly as possible. He had proved beyond question that he loved his mother, but had she in return given him any proof at all that she loved him? His intelligence was of a simple and direct kind, and he thought not.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### "WORSE THAN AN ASS."

THERE is, no doubt, a certain bitter sweetness in giving up all that we value for the sake of those whom we love; but it must be confessed that the bitterness predominates largely over the sweetness from the moment that we begin to suspect them of being unworthy of such a sacrifice. In reality they must always be so, because the worthy people will not accept sacrifices: still self-deception upon the point is not impossible. Unluckily for poor Willie, it had become so in his case, and without saying to himself in so many words that his mother's love for him was of a purely selfish order, he nevertheless knew the truth. Looking forward into the future, he could discern no prospect of compensation, nor any object that seemed much worth living for, except indeed his profession; and the profession of a soldier in time of peace cannot be counted as a very exciting one. It only remained for him to submit to his destiny with courage and

resignation; to submit to it cheerfully was, he felt, beyond him.

It has been said that he had at last begun to feel a little hopeful with regard to Lady Evelyn. Nothing verbal, it is true, had passed between them of a nature to justify hope; but he had made tentative advances which had not been repelled, and once or twice, when their eyes had chanced to meet, he had fancied that he saw a look in hers which had not been there before—although, of course, he might have been quite mistaken. Well, at any rate, there must be an end of all that now. Whatever his chances might have been, he had deliberately parted with them, and there was no other course open to him than to part also with her. He must make some excuse for leaving Torquay as soon as possible, since it was no longer in his power to associate with her upon a footing of mere acquaintanceship, nor permissible for him to associate with her upon any other footing. Meanwhile, he resolved that he would avoid seeing her at all until he should have received his uncle's reply to the communication which he now sat down to write.

He could not, even if he had wished to do so, have concealed from the head of the banking firm so important a circumstance as that he desired to

sell out £4000 forthwith, and he thought it best to despatch a private letter to Sir George, as well as a formal notification of his requirements to the bank. He said what he had to say simply and without any attempt at excuse or apology; for his uncle, as he very well knew, would consider his action hopelessly inexcusable. It was not even worth while to state his motives, the cogency of which could never be rendered manifest to a sensible man like Sir George. As to the results which would follow, Willie did not feel the slightest doubt. It was all very well for his mother to smile at the threats of a man who had no heir and would be puzzled to find one, but, as a matter of fact, Willie knew his uncle to be not only obstinate but conscientious. There were many points upon which Sir George might be opposed and vanquished; but with regard to the custody of his money and the performance of what he believed to be his duty he was certain to be immovable.

The ensuing day was a very long and very sad one for our poor hero. He had, as was only to be expected, slept little and was feeling wretchedly ill; he would not go to Malton Lodge; he did not know how to occupy himself, and he was bound in honour to keep up appearances as far as he could before his mother, who evidently thought that he was repenting a little of his generosity. However, he

was under no such obligation to his step-father, who had the bad taste to be profusely grateful to him.

"Really, it's uncommonly good of you to help us out of this mess, my dear fellow," said Archdale, "and you may be sure that you will get the interest of your money regularly until I can scrape together enough to clear off the debt. I don't think you will be put to any serious inconvenience about it; still you have done me an immense service, which, I assure you, I shall never forget."

"I lent the money to my mother," answered Willie shortly.

"Yes, yes, I quite understand that. Only it was my fault that your mother had to ask you for it, you see."

"And I quite understand that," said Willie. "You have nothing to thank me for; so we needn't say any more about it."

But Archdale, thinking it a pity that this timely advance should be a cause of illfeeling between him and his benefactor, persisted in saying more. "Situated as I am just now," he explained, "it is a matter of sheer necessity for me to raise £4000 somehow or other, and you know—or perhaps you don't know—I'm sure I hope you don't—that applying to the Jews is a horribly expensive way of doing

business. The only thing I am sorry for is that, according to your mother, this may get you into trouble with your uncle. But, after all, I don't think he can grumble very much. It isn't as if you had taken to betting or gambling, as most young fellows with your expectations would do."

"My uncle will undoubtedly cut me out of his will," answered Willie. "I shall have enough of my own to live upon, but I shall not be able to afford any more loans. Perhaps it is as well to tell you that at once."

And, having imparted this agreeable piece of information, he left the room.

"That young man," mused Archdale, after he had gone, "has no sort of urbanity. What is the use of saying nasty things to a man who is trying hard to be civil to you? Well, I've done my best to conciliate him, and if he won't make friends, why, he must do the other thing: as he justly remarks, it isn't I who owe him any thanks. As for old Brett's cutting him off with a shilling, I expect he knows as well as I do that there's no fear of that."

But Willie, knowing Sir George a good deal better than Mr. Archdale did, was not in the least surprised when, by return of post, a letter reached him from Blaydon Hall, in which he was given plainly to understand that he must expect no

further favours from one whose wishes he had chosen to set at naught.

"Your instructions have been acted upon," Sir George wrote, "and in a few days' time the sum which you propose to hand over to your mother will be placed to your credit. Since your determination has been made with a full knowledge of its necessary consequences, I shall not waste time by reproaching you. I will merely mention that I shall this day sign a fresh will, in which your name will not appear. It would be idle to pretend that the news of your folly—and, I must add, your ingratitude—has not come upon me as a severe blow; but I must bear it as best I may. I trust that Lady Evelyn Foljambe, whom you appear willing to resign without a struggle, will think, as I do, that she is well rid of so weak-kneed a lover.

"There was some talk, I believe, of your coming here again before Christmas, but under all the circumstances I will ask you to consider that engagement cancelled. Your aunt, I am sorry to say, is once more seriously unwell, and I wish to spare her the distress of hearing that you have ceased to be what we have always hoped that you would be, namely, our successor here, and, to all intents and purposes, our son. This I could not do if you were in the house. I have nothing more

to say. Your mind is made up, and mine, as you are aware, was made up long ago. We need not quarrel over it; but it will be obvious to you that our relations must henceforth be of a far more formal kind than they have hitherto been."

That much was certainly obvious, and Willie could not take exception to the terms in which his uncle's more or less valedictory epistle was couched. It was as unequivocal as he had expected it to be, and a good deal more temperate than he had ventured to anticipate. And now, since everything was settled beyond recall, he thought there would be no harm in his walking as far as Malton Lodge. He could not tell Lady Wetherby in plain language that he had withdrawn the pretensions of which she had been informed; but he owed it to her to make the fact apparent, and this might easily be done by a casual mention of his intention to exchange into the linked battalion of his regiment, which was quartered in India.

Towards dusk, therefore, he set forth to acquit himself of his duty, fighting his way against a south-easterly gale and a cold, driving rain. Torquay, notwithstanding the high character that it bears as a health resort, is not exempt from occasional south-easterly winds, and no Englishman requires to be told what a combination of south-

easterly wind and wet weather means. One does not often meet with people who want to go to India; but under such horrible atmospheric conditions even a man who proposes to leave his heart behind him may feel that Asia possesses certain advantages over northern Europe. Willie was not quite philosophical enough to take that view, yet he was rather glad that the world looked so utterly dreary and woebegone that evening. Sunshine and a blue sky would have been intolerable.

The ladies were, of course, at home. He found them, as he had expected to find them, drinking tea before the fire, and they welcomed him all the more warmly because, as they declared, they had given up all hope that anybody would be charitable enough to enliven their solitude on such a day.

"What have you been doing with yourself all this time?" Lady Wetherby inquired. "I'm afraid it is hardly necessary to ask, though, for I can see by your face that you have been ill again. Have you any business to be here now, I wonder?"

"Oh yes," answered Willie, with a somewhat forlorn smile, for he was thinking that if Lady Wetherby knew all she would be decidedly of opinion that he had no business in her house. "There is nothing particular the matter with me; only I am feeling a little seedy to-day."

"Who wouldn't be in such weather?" exclaimed Lady Evelyn. "If one must needs be soaked to the skin and chilled to the marrow of one's bones, surely one might as well be following the hounds in one's native county."

"I suppose you will be in your native county before the hunting is over," said Willie interrogatively.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Not until after Christmas, anyhow, and even then I don't know. It depends upon mamma, who is hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt or the wind and dust of the Riviera. But I live in hopes."

This was perhaps as good an opportunity as another for announcing that soon after Christmas he himself would in all probability be on his way towards a sunnier clime; but Willie did not profit by it. He was afraid of being catechized, and thought it would be wiser to defer his statement until the last moment. So he swallowed the tea which was poured out for him, and talked and was talked to for a time, though what the subjects conversed about were he would have been puzzled to say afterwards.

The entrance of an old woman, enveloped in furs, who, by her own account, had braved the elements in order to make sure of finding dear

Lady Wetherby at home, necessarily threw the responsibility of entertaining him upon Lady Evelyn, and she proceeded to do so by retiring to the other end of the double drawing-room and making him a sign to follow her. A few days before he would have been overjoyed by such a mark of favour, but now it only made his heart ache the more. What could he say to her? All he knew was that he was in duty bound to avoid saying too much.

As it happened, things were made comparatively easy for him; for Lady Evelyn, after some further disparaging criticisms upon the climate of the west of England, asked him whether he expected to be quartered much longer at Plymouth, and as that was a question to which he would have to give a definite reply before quitting the house, he did not see his way to evade answering it at once.

"The regiment will be there for another year most likely," he said, in as unconcerned a voice as he could command, "but I don't think I shall remain with it. I want to exchange to India if I can."

There was no lamp in the room where they were seated, and Lady Evelyn was shielding her face from the fire with a hand-screen, so that it was impossible to see how she was affected by his words, though he stole an eager side-glance at her

as soon as they were uttered. It must be owned that he was a little disappointed by the perfect indifference with which she returned—

"Really! Will you like that better than England, do you think?"

"In some ways, I dare say," he answered. "Of course, one is sorry to leave one's friends."

"Oh, you will make new ones. Your mother will be sorry to lose you, though. And what about your uncle—does he approve?"

"I don't suppose he will object; but I haven't consulted him. I'm not bound to consult him, you know."

"I thought he was rather under the impression that you were; but old gentlemen are very liable to be under mistaken impressions of that kind. When do you propose to start?"

To an experienced student of women, like Cecil Archdale, this assumption of nonchalance would have appeared decidedly overdone; but it was quite artistic enough to deceive Willie, who accepted it as a convincing proof that his half-formed hopes had been built upon sand, and who was scarcely as glad of that as he ought to have been. He explained that exchanges could not be effected at a moment's notice, and that there was little likelihood of his getting away from England

before the spring, but that, as he had various arrangements to make, he would probably rejoin his regiment very shortly.

"So that we shan't see much more of you, I presume," observed Lady Evelyn cheerfully. "Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself out there and have plenty of pig-sticking. If I were you I should make a point of going to some place where there are pigs to stick."

She went on chatting about Indian field sports and other kindred topics for ten minutes or so, after which the old lady in the next room took her departure, and Willie rose to do likewise. He did not inform Lady Wetherby of his plans, knowing that she would hear about them presently from her daughter, so that his leave-taking was only such as is customary between people who expect to meet again on the morrow.

Nevertheless he had almost made up his mind that it should be final. When he was once more out in the wind and the rain, he said to himself that it would be wiser not to risk a second visit to Malton Lodge. Lady Wetherby might, and very likely would, ask for explanations which it would be painful as well as useless to give, and Evelyn, it was very plain, would not trouble her head about him after he should be out of sight. He

must get the doctor's permission to return to duty, or, if that could not be obtained, he must invent some pretext for running up to London.

It was now quite dark, and he would have passed without recognizing a solitary pedestrian whom he met breasting the hill which he was descending, had not that individual hailed in Mortimer's voice—

"Hullo, Brett! It *is* Brett, isn't it?"

Willie took his friend's outstretched hand. "What in the world has brought you here, Mortimer?" he asked. "I thought you were never coming to Torquay any more."

"Well, so did I," answered the other, with a laugh; "but I went off in such a hurry that I left some things behind me at the hotel, and then there were some bills that I forgot to pay, and—and so I thought I would just run down for a couple of nights."

But perhaps he felt that this was really too lame an explanation to pass muster; for he added, with another apologetic laugh, "Well, the fact is, I wanted to have a last glimpse of—of you all. Between you and me, old man, I find that shooting won't do—I must get out of the old groove altogether. So I've made up my mind to go round the world, and I expect I shall be away for at least a year.

Now, tell me, is everything settled between you and Lady Evelyn ?"

They were standing in the middle of the road, exposed to the full fury of the weather; but hard by was one of those flights of steps, known in Torquay as "slips," which enable foot-passengers to scale the many hills in a somewhat shorter space of time than is required by vehicles, and which are usually flanked on either side by the high walls of adjacent gardens. Into the comparative shelter thus afforded Willie now drew his friend, and there briefly related how all his hopes had come to shipwreck. There was nobody in the world except Mortimer to whom he could speak so openly, and it was in some sort a relief to him to be able to tell the whole truth. But if he expected comfort or sympathy, he mistook his man.

"I must say, Brett, that I think you have been worse than an ass," was Mortimer's comment upon his narrative. "If you had been content with ruining yourself, you would have been only an ass, I suppose; but what right have you to throw over a girl whom you profess to love ? You can't really care very much about her."

"You don't understand," returned Willie. "I haven't thrown her over; she wouldn't have taken me under any circumstances."

"How do you know that? Have you asked her?"

"No; but it isn't always necessary to ask—you yourself admitted that before you went away."

"One can't be sure of anything without asking."

"Well—why don't you do it, then?"

"Upon my word, Brett," answered Mortimer, after pondering for a few seconds, "I think I will. I'm sure I don't know whether you're mistaken or not about Lady Evelyn's feelings; but any way, it seems to me that you've chosen to put yourself out of it. Neither her mother nor Wetherby would allow her to marry you upon your present income, and I agree with you that you couldn't make such an offer to her. So I don't see why I shouldn't try my luck. I can but fail after all."

He was, no doubt, fully entitled to try his luck upon a forlorn hope; and forlorn hopes, as has been proved again and again, often turn out successful. To be sure, he had heard with his own ears what had sounded like an unequivocal avowal on Lady Evelyn's part of her love for Willie Brett; yet in moments of excitement people sometimes say things which they do not mean. Moreover, the pain of separation from her had abated something of his pride; so that he would now have been thankful to be accepted, even though

it should be for reasons which he had once declared insufficient to satisfy him.

He met with no opposition from Willie, who wished him good night, but could not find it in his heart to wish him good luck. So these two friends went their several ways, each of them, naturally enough, feeling a little disappointed in the other. Willie, as Mortimer had truly said, had been worse than an ass, while Mortimer had perhaps taken a somewhat mercenary and commonplace view of a cruelly hard case.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### LADY EVELYN DISGRACES HERSELF.

When Marcia was informed—for there was no possibility of disguising the truth from her—that Sir George Brett had proved as good as his word and had disinherited his nephew, she entrenched herself in a position of obstinate incredulity, whence she was not to be dislodged by any efforts on Willie's part.

"Oh, he may say this, that, or the other," she declared; "it doesn't by any means follow that he will do what he says he will do. You may hold a pistol to a man's head and shout out 'Your money or your life!' but if you can't frighten him and can't get his money, you won't run the risk of shooting him. George has always been a bully. When he finds that bullying won't help him with you, he will surrender for his own sake, if not for yours. He can't do otherwise, because he can't discover anybody to replace you."

This attitude of Marcia's had the convenience of

relieving her from any pangs of conscience; but, to do her justice, she did not knowingly adopt it on that account. She was persuaded that Sir George would come round in time, and as for her son's abandonment of the hopes he had cherished, she really could not see that that was a subject for regret. He had not intended to breathe a word to her about those hopes; but it is needless to say that she extorted a full confession from him with very little difficulty, and, having done so, she did not fail to point out to him how undeserving of any honest man's love a girl must be to whom that love could not so much as be avowed without a simultaneous production of vouchers to show that he was wealthy as well as love-sick.

Willie did not argue the point, he confined himself to a statement which could not be disputed—namely, that whether Lady Evelyn was deserving or undeserving, he loved her. That was why he must leave Torquay, and that was why he had determined to exchange to India as soon as might be. Marcia, however, would not hear of either of these projects. The question of India she was content to leave in abeyance, reserving it for future discussion; but to her son's leaving her in his present weak state of health she could not and would not consent. The end of it was that, for

the sake of peace, he agreed to remain where he was a little longer. When all was said, it did not so very much signify. Probably he would see little or nothing more of Lady Evelyn. Besides, it would not matter if he did, supposing that she accepted Mortimer, which he was now inclined to think that there was every chance of her doing.

During several days he vainly awaited news of his rival, who, he thought, would surely have the common humanity to communicate with him, and at length he could no longer resist setting forth upon a round of inquiry to the various hotels. His curiosity was gratified at the first of these to which he applied, where he learnt that Mr. Mortimer had left Torquay on the previous morning. That might be taken as tolerably conclusive evidence that Mr. Mortimer had been dismissed. Perhaps it was selfish and ill-natured to rejoice, but he could not help rejoicing; and indeed he was able to say to himself that he had a right to do so, since he was persuaded that if Lady Evelyn had consented to marry Mortimer it would not have been because she loved the man. And, on his return home, his mother had a piece of intelligence to impart to him which raised his spirits still farther, although he hardly knew why it should.

"Laura Wetherby has been here," Marcia told him; "she came to say good-bye. It seems that they have decided all of a sudden to go off to Cannes for the winter. I don't know what has come over Laura, but she isn't at all what she used to be. Her manner was very cold and disagreeable this afternoon, and when I asked her what was the matter she wouldn't tell me. I could guess, though, as soon as I heard that Mr. Mortimer had been here and had gone away again. That girl has been a little too clever, and between two stools she has fallen to the ground. I would give something to see her face when you take leave of her and omit to give her the option of rejecting you. Because of course you won't give her the option. Just now you are by way of being a poor man with no expectations, and I presume you won't be quite so ridiculous as to lay your poverty and your blank prospects at her feet."

"I shall not do that," answered Willie curtly. "I shall not even take leave of her. I did take leave of them after a fashion the other day, and I don't care to go to Malton Lodge again."

"Well, I think you will have to go," said Marcia, who felt that he might safely be allowed to do so, and was anxious to insure the discomfiture of Lady Evelyn. "Laura made me promise to send you

to tea there; apparently she thinks that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Poor Laura! I am really sorry for her, though she richly deserves to be put to confusion. I could see that she was anxious to impress upon me how very condescending it was of her to consent to a match between her daughter and my son. And it so happens that not even a threat of rushing off to the south of France will secure my son for her."

Willie glanced at the clock and got up. It would be better to incur such suffering as might have to be undergone in the course of a last interview with the girl whom he loved than to listen any longer to that kind of thing. Besides, foolish though it might be to wish for one more sight of her face, he did wish for it. So, shortly afterwards, he was shown into the drawing-room at Malton Lodge, where he found Lady Wetherby alone.

She rose at once and held out her hand, looking at him with kindly, sorrowful eyes. "I am so glad you have come!" she said. "It was good of you to grant my request, because I know you would rather have stayed away. But I felt that I couldn't bear to leave Torquay without telling you that I admire and respect you, though I can't think you wise."

"You know all about it, then?" said Willie.

"Yes; Mr. Mortimer told me. He proposed to Evelyn the day before yesterday, and she refused him. I am sorry for it, because I like him, and I don't think she will easily find his superior; but if she doesn't care for him, there is no more to be said. Perhaps you are his superior in some ways—only, you see, you have made yourself impossible."

"I couldn't do otherwise," said Willie.

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me that it was a tremendous sacrifice to make for a very doubtful advantage. Nevertheless, I am not so insensible but that I can admire you for making it. My admiration isn't of much use to you, though, is it?" she added, with a compassionate smile.

"Yes, it is," returned Willie; "it is a very great comfort and happiness to me to know that you understand. The sacrifice isn't quite so tremendous as it looks, either. All I have given up is the succession to my uncle's property, which I didn't particularly care about."

"Haven't you given up rather more than that?"

"No; because I know now that I am nothing at all to Lady Evelyn, and that I never could have been anything. I dare say she has told you that I am going out to India. I mentioned that

to her the other day, and I suppose I hoped that she would be a little bit sorry. But she didn't care in the least; she only recommended me to go to some place where plenty of sport was obtainable. Well, of course she wouldn't have spoken in that way, if she had ever thought of me otherwise than as one of the nonentities whom she is accustomed to meet and forget."

Lady Wetherby may have held a different opinion, but it was obviously out of the question for her to contradict him. From the highest of motives this noble but misguided young man had seen fit to cut his own throat: what good purpose could be served by suggesting to him that if he had abstained from that fatal act he might have had a happy life? So she only looked regretful and held her tongue, and perhaps wished that he would go away.

He was about to do so when Lady Evelyn's entrance obliged him to resume his seat for a few minutes. At least, he said to himself, that politeness compelled him to submit to a brief and painful ordeal, though in truth he would have suffered a good deal more pain rather than forego it. As it happened, he was not detained long. He had the pain and the pleasure of looking at Lady Evelyn, but it was little that he heard of

the sound of her voice, for she was unusually subdued and scarcely addressed half a dozen words to him. He surmised that she knew all, that his presence was somewhat embarrassing to her, and that she would be glad to get rid of him. Therefore he soon rose to say farewell—a ceremony which was accomplished after an unemotional fashion which Lady Wetherby thought creditable to all concerned. Presently it was all over; he was out of the house, and he felt, as he walked slowly away, that the curtain had fallen finally upon the romance of his life.

However, he had not taken many steps before he was called by name in a voice which he had not expected to hear again, unless it might be in his dreams.

"I forgot to tell you," Lady Evelyn said, when she caught him up, "that the garden gate is locked; but I have the key here, and I can let you out that way, if you like."

He made some stupid reply to the effect that he was sorry to give her so much trouble. He hardly knew what he said; for he was a good deal perturbed and taken aback. Somehow or other, he felt sure that this offer of providing him with a means of exit for which he had not been making was only a pretext, and that she had something

particular to say to him. Nor was his intuition at fault, as her first words proved.

"Mr. Brett," she said, while they were walking down the steep path which led through the garden, "I want to know why you are going to India."

He glanced quickly at her; but the light of a watery November moon betrayed no secrets, and he could not tell whether her question was prompted by mere curiosity or by some kindly suspicion of the truth. "I think you do know," he answered at length; though he felt that he had no business to make such an answer.

"Do I?" she returned. "If I do, it is only because I heard something from Mr. Mortimer which I did not wish to believe."

"I am sure of that," said Willie; "I was sure that, if you ever heard of it, you would be sorry for it. But it is true, and it can't be helped, and it is no fault of yours—or of mine. After all, I think I am rather glad that you know. It isn't as if my love for you could cause you the smallest annoyance or discomfort. We live in such different worlds that you are very unlikely to come across me again or even to hear my name mentioned, and I suppose it isn't an insult to love you, though perhaps it would have been rather absurd and impertinent to tell you so. That is,

if I had told you with any idea that my love could possibly be returned."

"Is that genuine modesty or only a conventional way of speaking?" Lady Evelyn inquired. "I certainly didn't gather from what Mr. Mortimer said that you were so humble as all that."

"I don't know what Mortimer may have told you," replied Willie; "but I dare say I can guess. He told you, perhaps, that if I had been a rich man I should have summoned up courage to ask you to marry me, but that I couldn't ask you when I found out that I should always be poor. Was that it?"

Lady Evelyn made a sign of assent.

"Well," resumed Willie, "I can't deny that it was so. My uncle encouraged me, and so did Lady Wetherby—or, at any rate, I thought she did. And sometimes you yourself said things which of course you didn't mean to be encouraging, but which I was blind enough to fancy so. Do what one will, one can't give up every shred of hope until one has some decisive proof that hope is ridiculous. I quite understand now that it never entered into your head to think of me as you thought of Mortimer."

"No; I have never thought of you in that way," the girl replied. "I suppose your notion

of the way in which I thought of Mr. Mortimer was that, taking him all round, he was too eligible to be lightly rejected. All the same, I did reject him, you see. There is no harm in my mentioning that, because I know you were in his confidence, and you must have understood why he went away."

"Yes, and Lady Wetherby told me too. I never believed that you cared for him, but I did think that you might consent to marry him, because several times you spoke to me as if you would. I am much more glad than sorry that I did you an injustice."

"Oh, you did not do me an injustice; I seriously contemplated marrying him at one time. Only, as I am not going to marry him, notwithstanding all the inducements that he has to offer, think you might give me credit for being a little less greedy and selfish than you make me out."

By this time they had reached the gate, upon which Willie dropped his elbows, gazing down at the bare branches of the trees beneath and the moonlit expanse of sea beyond. He said, "I didn't mean to call you selfish or greedy; of course, I know that you are neither the one nor the other. But to some people, I suppose, money

is just as much a necessary of life as food and fresh air are to me. Your mother told me just now that I had made myself impossible, which is perfectly true. Well, you see, Mortimer was possible; and I think you liked him without loving him."

"What constitutes impossibility?" Lady Evelyn inquired. "I admit that it is impossible to marry upon two or three hundred a year; but if you hesitate to ask any one whom you love to marry you upon what you have, that can only be because you think she wouldn't consent to do without luxuries for your sake."

Willie started and turned round, so as to face her; his eyes dilated with wonderment and interrogation. But she did not flinch from his scrutiny.

"I mean it," she said. "That is what I understood from Mr. Mortimer, and that is what I was sorry to hear. I hoped that, if you cared for me at all, you would have had a rather better opinion of me than that."

And, as Willie was evidently too much astonished to make any rejoinder, she went on presently, with a little burst of laughter which was not very far removed from tears: "Oh, how stupid you are! Everybody knows, except you; and now

I have had to disgrace myself by running after you and entreating you not to desert me! It would have served you well right if I had let you go off to India; only—only then I should have punished myself rather more than you, perhaps."

Are there really people who like to read letters which are not addressed to them, to listen at doors and to peep through keyholes? It is said that there are, and the assertion may be true; but the readers of this narrative shall not be insulted by the suggestion that any of them can belong to that most ignoble species. The mutual avowals of two young lovers are beyond question charming, beautiful, and as nearly divine as anything in this fallen world can be—but to appreciate them it is necessary to be one of the lovers. We do not wish to overhear what our neighbours may have to say to one another upon such occasions. What is certain is that they always take an unconscionably long time about repeating phrases which ought to be stale, but never will be stale so long as the course of Nature continues to run along its appointed track.

It is natural to love, it is natural to think nothing of sacrifices incurred for the sake of those whom we love, and surely it is unnatural to marry from any other motive than love. This was what

Evelyn Foljambe succeeded in impressing upon Willie Brett when he dwelt upon the hardships of a soldier's life and contrasted it with the mode of existence which he presumed to be essential to members of the aristocracy and plutocracy. If she didn't mind being comparatively poor, and if he didn't mind, what could other people's definitions of an impossible match signify to them?

And if anybody is disposed to sympathize with poor Lady Wetherby, who was well aware that her daughter had gone out, and who was in a fever of doubt and anxiety all this time, it may be acknowledged that his sympathy is not bestowed unworthily. Lady Wetherby had tried to do her duty; she was old enough to know that love-matches do not invariably bring about contentment, and she hoped that so honourable a young man as Mr. Brett had proved himself to be would feel bound to refrain from the declaration of sentiments which he had no right to declare. However, she had taken no account of the quandary in which an honourable young man who has had a declaration made to him may find himself; so that she felt entitled to be very angry when at length Willie and Evelyn re-entered the drawing-room, looking somewhat guilty, yet by no means ashamed of themselves.

## CHAPTER XV.

### MARCIA DECLINES TO JUMP.

It is all very well, and perhaps it is quite legitimate, to be angry with two young idiots who, ignorant of the changes and chances of this transitory life, are bent upon linking their fortunes, or absence of fortunes, together for no better reason than that they have fallen in love with one another; but what is the use of picking even a legitimate quarrel with human nature? We cannot alter it; we cannot make young people old or fools wise, and some of us are not altogether convinced that such a process would be salutary if we could bring it about. Lady Wetherby said everything that a sensible, practical, middle-aged woman could say. She began by scolding; then, growing cooler, she pointed out some of the inevitable consequences of marrying upon a small income; then she dwelt upon the fact, which could not be denied, that there is a vast difference

between romance and reality—and it is needless to add that she might just as well have held her tongue.

"We know all that, mamma," Lady Evelyn said meekly; "we are aware that we are going to behave in a most senseless way, and that all our relations will point the finger of scorn at us. But the worst of it is that we don't care a bit."

And then, after some further interchange of arguments, which could only be called arguments in so far as that they were couched in argumentative forms, Willie put in his word.

"Lady Wetherby," said he, "how would you yourself have acted if you had been in Evelyn's place, or in mine? My firm belief is that you would have acted exactly as we have done."

"Then all I can say is that you little know me," returned Lady Wetherby, with some asperity. "I don't know so much about Evelyn, because of course excuses ought to be made for girls who —who—in short, for girls of her age; but I must say that your proper course was as plain as anything could be, and I quite thought that you realized it. I never was so taken in by anybody in my life! Didn't you tell me in so many words that you recognized the impossibility of coming forward under the circumstances, and that you

were going off to India without loss of time on that very account?"

"He really was going," Lady Evelyn interposed before the young man could make any reply; "he had taken all the first steps, and he would have taken all the rest if I hadn't rushed after him and caught him by the collar. I alone am to blame for this scandalous business; and, as I said before, I don't care a bit. Now, mamma, what are you going to do? I know what you can't do; but I should like to hear what you think you can."

"I can refuse my consent," answered Lady Wetherby feebly.

"Oh, but you won't. You would never do such an unkind thing as that—especially if you were brought to see, as you very soon would be, that it would be useless as well as unkind. What you mean is that you are bound to protest, and we fully acknowledge that you are. Well, you have made your protest now, and I suppose Wetherby will make his."

"There can't be the shadow of a doubt that he will."

"Quite so. After which, you will all of you have to make the best of what can't be helped. Only it would be much nicer and much more like you to give in with a good grace at once. At the bottom

of your heart you are on our side already—you know you are ! "

Perhaps she was; perhaps ninety-nine people out of a hundred are, at the bottom of their hearts, on the side of imprudent lovers, although, for obvious reasons, they ought to hesitate before saying so. Lady Wetherby, at all events, ended by saying so. She could not approve of her daughter's marrying a poor man; yet she could not help being glad that her daughter was capable of such folly. Besides, when she had struck her colours and when the question of ways and means had been brought up for discussion, she was able to console herself with the thought that Evelyn, after all, would only be comparatively poor. She herself would for the rest of her life be rich; she could easily make the young couple an allowance and lay by enough to leave them a substantial sum when she died. Moreover, it was difficult to believe that Sir George Brett's obduracy would prove invincible.

And thus, when Willie went away, with a heart full of joy and thankfulness, he was able to say to himself that his future mother-in-law was one of the best and kindest of women. It is not everybody who can think of his mother-in-law in that way, and our hero cheerfully acknowledged his

great good luck. To be sure, he might, if his temperament had been less amiable and his spirits less high, have reflected that, by way of compensation, he was not precisely lucky in his mother; but of course it never occurred to him to admit that ungenerous thought. Indeed, he went so far as to count in advance upon his mother's sympathy — which was certainly somewhat oversanguine on his part. He reached home only just in time to dress for dinner; so that his first opportunity of imparting the great news to her came later in the evening, when her husband, who had been virtuously employed all day in making studies for a new picture, started for the club to enjoy a little well-earned relaxation.

"I hope," Marcia began at once, "that Laura and Lady Evelyn kept their tempers with you. They must have been furiously angry, I know; but they would probably have sense enough to see that they couldn't show their anger without being ridiculous. I wonder what they are saying about you now."

"Nothing so unfair as what you are saying about them," answered Willie, the colour mounting into his cheeks for a moment. "You don't understand them one bit, mother."

Marcia smiled. "I flatter myself that I under-

stand them pretty well," said she. "Not being in love with the girl, I can form a rather more impartial opinion of her than certain other people can; but I won't vex you by repeating it. As for Laura, I don't forget that she was my best friend for a great many years. She has her little failings; still I would rather not dwell upon them now that she is about to drop us for ever. Because I am very sure that that is what she is going to do."

"No, that is just what she is not going to do. It has all come so suddenly and unexpectedly that I can hardly believe it is true; and I am sure you will hardly believe it. All the same, it *is* true. Evelyn has promised to marry me, mother, poor as I am, and Lady Wetherby has given her consent. Now, what do you think of these two worldly-wise people?"

What could Marcia be expected to think of worldly-wise people who were exhibiting themselves in so much more generous and unselfish a light than she herself was doing? She turned pale and bit her lips with vexation; she made a gallant effort to congratulate Willie and to assure him that if he was happy she was satisfied; but her congratulations had no ring of sincerity, and her dissatisfaction was not to be concealed. She was obliged to say at last that Laura Wetherby's

generosity was perhaps not quite as striking as it might appear.

"You see, my dear Willie, she must know perfectly well that all this talk about your being a poor man is really nonsense. George wouldn't have disinherited you in any case, and as soon as he hears that you are going to marry an earl's daughter he will hasten to show that earls and countesses can't outdo him in magnanimity. The whole thing is a farce. However, I don't want you to think me unkind. What must be must, and I will try to like Lady Evelyn for your sake, though I am afraid she will never like me. Only I can't pretend to be jubilant or to be grateful to her for her condescension in accepting you—*faute de mieux*."

If Willie had not possessed one of the sweetest dispositions that ever mortal man was blessed with, he would have lost his temper and told his mother some wholesome truths. He did neither the one nor the other; but he was hurt, and could not speak as he would have liked to speak. One may make great allowance for the jealousy of those who love us; yet it is scarcely possible to conciliate them while jealousy distorts their whole mental vision. He could only trust to time for the bringing about of a happier state of things.

Lady Wetherby, who called on the following day to talk matters over with her old friend, was a good deal less forbearing. Lady Wetherby (and small blame to her !) thought that she was behaving very handsomely, and had been prepared to receive such acknowledgment of her handsome behaviour as was her due ; so that it was not a little provoking to her to find herself confronted by a grumbling, disconsolate woman, who would say no more than that she was resigned to the inevitable.

"Oh, I thoroughly understand that from your point of view the match isn't exactly a desirable one, Laura," Mrs. Archdale was pleased to admit ; "but that doesn't make it a desirable one from mine. It isn't only that Willie is much too young to marry, but I know perfectly well that in giving him up to your daughter I am giving him up altogether and finally, because she has never made any secret of her aversion for me. Naturally, I don't enjoy that prospect."

"What nonsense ! " exclaimed Lady Wetherby. "Evelyn has no more feeling of aversion for you than I have, and men who can afford to marry always do marry sooner or later. The sooner the better, I should be inclined to say. And I must confess I think that a mother who was really fond of her son would be only too delighted to hear that

he had been successful with the girl upon whom he had set his heart."

"Oh yes, that would be your way of looking at it, no doubt. It is the usual and conventional way. But I suppose Willie has been more to me than most sons are to their mothers. I have been parted from him all these years, and now, just when he seemed to be coming back to me again, I must lose him—and for ever! There is no help for it; he obeys his natural instincts, and I am not entitled to complain. Only you must not ask me to jump for joy."

"I'm sure nobody wants you to jump, Marcia," returned Lady Wetherby, losing all patience; "if anything in the world is wanted of you, it is only that you should try to realize the existence of other people, whose happiness is probably as important to them as yours is to you."

Marcia melted into tears. "Happiness!" she ejaculated—"happiness and I parted company a very long time ago. It seems to me that everybody has entered into a league to make me appear odious. That has been George's and Caroline's object all along, and certainly they have managed to achieve it. It looks as if I had extorted money from Willie and had caused his uncle to cast him adrift; it looks as if I were opposing his marriage,

and as if I didn't care what became of him so long as I could keep him with me for the rest of my life. Yet none of these things are true. Was it to please myself, do you think, that I surrendered him to the Bretts? Was it to please myself that I asked him for a loan of a few thousand pounds? And should I have done such a thing, even to save Cecil and myself from ruin, if I had not been as certain as I sit here that George's menaces were mere idle vapouring? But I suppose it is useless and hopeless to undertake my own defence. All my life long it has been the same story; my mistake has been in loving those whom I have loved too much. If I had been ordinary and reasonable and commonplace, as—as most people are, perhaps —I shouldn't be so miserable now."

She really was miserable. Lady Wetherby, notwithstanding some pardonable irritation, perceived that, and was not cruel enough to point out what she perceived quite as clearly, namely, that Marcia did not so much as understand the meaning of love. There are plenty of human beings whose passions and affections, strong though they may be, are purely subjective in nature, and any endeavour to convince such persons of selfishness would be as futile as the attempt to persuade a man with no musical ear that there is an excruciating difference

between G natural and G flat. It was somewhat trying to be compelled to take up an apologetic tone instead of nobly disclaiming all desire to be met with apologies; but Lady Wetherby was a most good-natured woman. She admitted that Marcia's life had not been a fortunate one; she declared that there should henceforth be no question of separating her from her son; and she agreed—although she was by no means convinced of that—that Sir George Brett was sure to "come round."

Willie, who knew his uncle, was very certain that Sir George would do no such thing, and very anxious that no mistaken hopes should be entertained by Lady Wetherby upon the subject. "Of course," he told her, "I shall write and announce my engagement to Uncle George, and he will be delighted to hear of it. By return of post I shall get a letter to say that, under all the circumstances, he is willing to give me one more chance, and that if I will promise and vow never to lend my mother another penny, he will overlook my past disobedience. But I can't make such a promise, and he won't be contented with anything less."

"Oh, well," said Lady Wetherby, laughing and shrugging her shoulders, "since you are both so obstinate there is nothing to be done with you, I'm afraid. Still, I trust you will bear in mind that

for the future there will be at least one person who will have more claim upon you than your mother."

Willie nodded. "I can't give what I haven't got," he replied; "but, indeed, I don't think my mother will ever apply to me again; only I mustn't bind myself to let her starve, you see."

He despatched his communication the same evening; but before there had been time for him to receive an answer by post a telegram reached him from Sir George which threw his present affairs into the background for the time being—

"Your aunt is dying, and wishes to see you. Come at once."

When this summons was shown to Marcia she smiled sceptically, remarking, "If Caroline had died every time that she has been dying in the last twenty years or so, she would be a great deal more dead than Queen Anne by now. George's telegram, being interpreted, only means that he is going to haul down his colours."

But whatever the meaning of it might be, it could not be disregarded, and Willie, after hastily packing up a few clothes, took the first train for London.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SIR GEORGE'S LAST CONCESSION.

Ever since the days of Æsop, and doubtless during the many centuries which preceded the birth of that moralist, people who have fallen into the habit of crying "Wolf!" have had to suffer the penalty of being disbelieved when the wolf has at length reached their door, and Marcia had every excuse for surmising that her sister-in-law was no nearer death now than she had been a dozen times before. Nevertheless, Lady Brett's doctor could have told her that for some time past his patient's life had not been worth a year's purchase.

Willie, who was more or less aware of this, did not share his mother's incredulity, and, as he journeyed towards London, his soft heart was full of sorrow, in which there was a touch of quite uncalled-for remorse. In reality his conduct as a nephew had been irreproachable; yet it was natural enough that he should accuse himself of ingratitude, for his aunt had certainly been fonder

of him than he had ever been of her. Nobody, perhaps, could have contrived to be very fond of Lady Brett, whose defects were of a kind more repulsive to ordinary human nature than those of less deserving persons: it is, no doubt, far easier to sympathize with an interesting sinner than with a dull and self-righteous saint. But characters are, for the most part, created by circumstances, and she might possibly have been an altogether different woman if her parents had not happened to be narrow-minded, bigoted people, or even if she had had children of her own. At any rate, she had been a good friend to Willie; she had more than once averted collisions between him and his uncle, and it grieved him to think that he must disappoint her upon what might very likely prove to be her death-bed by refusing to grant the request which he was pretty sure that she intended to make. Although he could not promise to abstain from aiding his mother in the event of her becoming destitute, his common-sense told him that the exaction of such a promise was not wholly unjustifiable.

As matters turned out, however, he was spared any pain that his aunt could have inflicted upon him; for when he arrived at Blaydon Hall, the butler, who admitted him, shook his head and said—

"You're too late, Master Willie; her ladyship passed away quite quiet and easy soon after the middle of the day. We none of us thought the end was so near; but the doctor he told me the wonder was she'd lasted so long. I wish you could have been here yesterday, sir."

"I am very, very sorry," said Willie, truthfully enough. "I had no idea that she was dangerously ill until I got my uncle's telegram, and then I started by the first train. How is he, Benson?"

"Well, sir, he do seem to take on more than I should have expected," answered the man candidly. "Sir George was never one to show much affection, not so far as words go; but he's always been what I call a domestic man, and I dessay he feels terrible lonesome now. I hope you ain't a-going to desert him in his old age, Master Willie—if you'll excuse the liberty of my saying so."

Benson, who for many years past had been accustomed to take any liberties that he saw fit to take with the heir-presumptive, was evidently aware of the existence of strained relations between that young man and the head of the house; still it was impossible to discuss these with him, and Willie made no reply.

"Do you think my uncle would like to see me?" he asked, after a pause.

Benson said he would inquire, and, having done so, presently returned with an affirmative answer. "Sir George is in the libery, sir. He ain't had nothink to eat since breakfast, and he won't give no orders; but if you was to tell him you was tired and hungry after your journey, maybe he'd take some dinner with you. Come to his time of life, 'tis foolishness to go to bed upon an empty stomach, you see."

Willie found his uncle looking very old, shaken and subdued. The butler's description of Sir George was as accurate as the descriptions which servants give of their masters generally are: he was not a particularly affectionate man, but he was essentially domestic, and he fully realized that his wife's death had left him alone in the world. However, he had nothing to say about that aspect of the blow which had fallen upon him, nor did he make any allusion to the news of Willie's engagement to Lady Evelyn Foljambe. He was an old-fashioned Philistine of the evangelical variety of that species, and probably he thought that at such a time it would be indecent to do so. For the same reason, no doubt, he was sitting with the family Bible open upon the table before him, and from it he quoted certain passages which seemed to be appropriate to the occasion. Willie

could not persuade him to enter the dining-room; but he consented, by way of compromise, to have some food sent in to him upon a tray. He then thought it necessary to mention the arrangements that he had made with the undertaker and the date which had been decided upon for the funeral: after which he expressed a wish to be left alone.

During the next few days Willie saw very little of him, but gathered from some hints which he let fall in one of their interviews that he desired to maintain a sort of truce until Lady Brett's remains should have been deposited in the churchyard, and the blinds at Blaydon Hall should have been once more drawn up. He gave it to be understood that, after that, it would be his duty to deal briefly with matters pertaining to this present world.

And indeed it must be confessed that he lost no time in discharging that duty. When the last rites had been performed, and when the few persons who had been invited to attend them had gone away, Sir George drew his nephew into the dark little room which he called his study, and having requested him to take a chair, began—

"I have a proposition to make to you, Willie. I make it, I will own, with some degree of reluctance; but I make it in deference to the wishes of

one whom we have lost and who was dear to us both. Your poor aunt urged upon me repeatedly that I should, at the price of a sacrifice which she considered that I might easily make, reinstate you upon your former footing, and I am not concerned to deny that the sacrifice suggested is in itself comparatively trifling. To the principle involved I cannot but object; still, since I have resolved to make this last overture, it would be superfluous, as well as ungracious, to dwell upon that. In a word, then, I propose for the future to pay your mother £1000 a year and to leave in the hands of trustees a sum sufficient to produce the same annual amount for her benefit. On her decease this amount would cease to be payable, because I really do not see why I should provide for Mr. Archdale. In return I will merely ask you to give me your word of honour—which I know will be kept—that your mother shall receive no more gifts or loans of money from you. If you agree, I will gladly make such provisions for you and your wife as I told Lady Wetherby that I would make; but if you decline, I must wash my hands of you. I shall then have done all that your aunt's kindness prompted her to wish that I should do."

Now this was undoubtedly a generous proposal, and Willie understood that its generosity was not

of a pecuniary kind alone; yet he was less sensible of that than of what seemed to him to be the insulting assumption that his mother could be and must be bought off. In her name as well as his own, he gravely thanked his uncle, but made so bold as to assert that she would not accept the bribe held out to her.

"She will accept it," returned Sir George, with calm confidence, "unless she thinks that she may do better for herself by refusing it. In all probability, however, she will not care to play so risky a game. The question is whether, if she does accept, you will make the promise that I ask for."

"Oh yes, in that case I would make the promise," answered Willie, "but I don't think the case will arise. If you would only believe it, Uncle George, money isn't the first and last consideration with everybody. Look at Lady Wetherby, for instance —you'll allow that she has proved herself to be disinterested."

Sir George smiled. "My dear boy," he answered, "I have no quarrel with Lady Wetherby, who, I dare say, is as disinterested as she can afford to be; but I doubt whether she or your mother gave me credit for having strength of mind enough to keep my word. Well, they were right, you see;

although I should certainly have kept it if your aunt had not interceded on your behalf."

Sir George, it may be, was not very sorry to be provided with so good an excuse for doing a foolish thing; but Willie, as will be understood, had no great desire to become a rich man upon the terms proposed. Personally, he did not care very much about riches; he had obtained all that he asked of Fortune in the knowledge that Evelyn loved him for his own sake, and naturally he could not wish his mother to justify the cynical estimate of her upon which Sir George's suggestion was based.

"What are Lady Wetherby's plans for the winter?" his uncle asked presently. "Didn't you say something in your letter about her going to the south of France?"

"Yes," answered Willie; "but she has postponed her departure for the present. Indeed, I am not sure that she hasn't given it up altogether."

Sir George laughed. "I see. And perhaps for the same reason you may have given up the idea of going to India. Well, I hope you will give up the army also as soon as things have been definitely settled. You can't drag your wife about from one garrison to another; and, if she will consent to it, I should like you to consider this house as your home. I don't think you will find me much in

your way. However, that must be a matter for your decision and Lady Evelyn's; I only ask you to take pity upon a lonely old man as often as you can."

Willie expressed the gratitude which he honestly felt; yet it was with little expectation of being able to accede to his uncle's request that he returned to Torquay the next day. On his arrival he drove straight from the station to Malton Lodge, because he was not only eager to see Evelyn, but thought it would be desirable to take counsel with her before making the formal proposition to his mother which he was bound to make. If, however, he was secretly anxious to hear his view of that proposition confirmed by his betrothed, he was disappointed; for Lady Evelyn at once confessed that Sir George's offer did not strike her as being in any way outrageous.

"He means to be generous; and I must say that I think he is rather generous," she remarked. "I don't see why Mrs. Archdale should take offence at his offer."

"Wouldn't you take offence if such an offer were made to you?" asked Willie, a little reproachfully.

"I don't know what I might or might not do if I were in Mrs. Archdale's place—I can't quite

imagine myself in her place," answered the girl. "Only you mustn't be shocked and disgusted if she decides that a thousand a year in the hand is worth a good many thousands in the bush. Most people are of that opinion, you know."

"But most people," Willie urged, "wouldn't like to be treated as one treats an importunate beggar or an unbroken dog. Offering an annuity in that way is very much the same thing as saying, 'Take that and hold your tongue!' I hope my mother will refuse it; and I think she will. Shall you be sorry if she does?"

The girl looked at him in an odd, half-compassionate way, but with a great deal of love and tenderness in her eyes. He seemed to her to be so good and so simple, and to have so very slight a comprehension of the despicable race to which we all belong.

"My dear," she said gently, "nothing that pleases you will ever make me sorry. Do you think I am afraid of being poor? I wish I could have the chance of proving to you that no hardships could ever seem like hardships to me so long as we shared them. But I shall not have the chance, because we are not going to be poor at all. Do you know that Wetherby has written in the kindest possible way about our engagement, and

that he proposes to make magnificent settlements on my behalf? He says that if you are half as good a fellow as you used to be, he would rather have you for his brother-in-law than any other man in England. Well, of course I don't know what you used to be, but it seems to me that you are good enough now to deserve the settlements. And perhaps, after all, I am wrong and you are right, and this world isn't quite the wretched hole that I thought it was."

"I only wish everybody in the world was as happy as I am!" ejaculated Willie. "My mother isn't, and I am afraid she never will be; but that is hardly her fault. The world hasn't treated her very well, you see."

"Her daughter-in-law is going to treat her well, at all events," Lady Evelyn declared, for she could guess that that was what he wanted her to say. "Hitherto we haven't hit it off very successfully; but that is because I haven't tried. I am going to try now."

With that encouraging assurance to comfort him, Willie went on his way by-and-by, and if the promptitude with which he communicated it to his mother was no great evidence of tact, some allowance may surely be claimed for a lover who honestly believed that every sentiment uttered by his beloved

was worthy of the most enthusiastic admiration. Marcia, as may be supposed, thought differently. She tossed her head and said that she really had no ambition to be patronized by Lady Evelyn.

"Since she is to be your wife, I must make the best of her. We shall not quarrel—I hope we are neither of us quite silly enough to do that—but it would be ridiculous to pretend that we shall ever be upon affectionate terms. Indeed, it is not likely that we shall often meet."

As for Sir George's proposition, she scouted it with all the indignation that her son could have desired. It was a gross insult, she affirmed—the last of many which had been addressed to her from the same quarter. Of course, its sole object was to produce an estrangement which Sir George had been labouring through all these years to bring about, and she begged that Willie would write an emphatic refusal in her name on the morrow.

Nevertheless, when the morrow came, she withdrew her refusal. She had talked matters over with her husband in the interim, and he had persuaded her that she was not only entitled, but bound, for the sake of both her children, to accept this shred of a large fortune which would otherwise go a-begging. Archdale was fully alive to the meanness of an offer which, in the event of his

wife's premature decease, would throw him once more upon his own resources; but he pointed out that it would be both ungenerous and useless to deprive poor Willie of his inheritance, saddled though it was with conditions which never ought to have been imposed upon him. So, for Willie's sake, Marcia consented to pocket her pride and the money. She said she had never yet hesitated to make any sacrifice for Willie's sake, and it was too late in the day to begin now.

It may be strange, but it is certainly fortunate, that her son was able to believe in her sincerity. As she predicted, he has not seen a great deal of her since his marriage; for the Archdales have once more made their home in Italy, and at Blaydon, where the young people spend a good part of their time, they could scarcely be made welcome guests. However, they were good enough to spend the whole of the last season in Willie's London house, and there seems to be every probability of this becoming an annual custom. Archdale's resolution to work hard has not as yet borne much fruit; but he says with truth that he has always been a slow worker, and adds that he owes it to himself, as well as to the purchasers of his pictures, to eschew haste. Marcia and Lady Evelyn are as good friends as their respective

natures will allow them to be, which, to be sure, is not saying much. Yet their respective natures have, according to their respective ways, one point in common; and if between them they have not yet managed to spoil Willie Brett, that is only because he is one of those rare human beings whom it is impossible to spoil.

THE END.

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